
A Step into The Past

Book 06

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Chapter 1

Arriving safely in Xianyang

The State of Qin was founded on the eastern bank of the upper streams of the Qin River.

Ever since their ancestors started the kingdom, the Qins have favored taking over by strength, and were formed by traveling nomads. They struggled to survive in this difficult land and had long drawn battles with the Barbarians. Hence, every single word in their history is written with blood and tears.

Although their ways of battling in organized nomadic groups weakened their links with the earth and making it difficult for them to settle down in a place, but it resulted in the Qin's ancestors not being restricted by boundaries and were able to continuously venture into the never trodden land in the east and battle with the barbarians.

During the time of King Zhou, one of his subject with the family name Ying was given this place because of the contribution he made by helping the Zhous rear horses for battles and he established this region near the capital. In actual fact, this is a difficult task of helping King Zhou defend his borders and preventing the barbarians from attacking.

The 400 odd years of Western Zhou dynasty are the Qin's most difficult and arduous times. With sweat and blood and the countless lives of their own people, they protected their overlord, the Zhou Dynasty's western border

and at the same time continued with their expansion into the west. Facing such relentless challenges and with stubborn heroism, the Qins built an extremely solid foundation.

The chance of a lifetime finally fell on the Qins.

Because of the incompetent King You, the barbarians attacked the city and the King was killed. Thus the power of the Zhou dynasty was disintegrated.

King Ping moved to the east and due to his contribution in protecting the King, the Duke of Qin was bestowed a dukedom and the Qins finally have a place to call their own.

When the states first started their wars, the weakest among the 7 states was Qin. It was only when Duke Mu of Qin took over and he depended heavily on foreign advisors like Baili Xi, Jian Shu, Songsun Zhi etc, that he established a strong foundation.

The country and army really prospered due to the reforms of Duke Xiao and Shang Yang. They totally overturned the traditional setup of the tribes and established new military setups, where those who contributed militarily will be promoted and brought the power of the imperial family to its peak during their time. They also moved the Capital to Xianyang and built a majestic city with grand palaces and standardized weight measurements in the country. They divided the country into 31 provinces and abolished the borders set up in the past. The people are allowed to own their own land for farming, with the government taxing them directly.

Hence the state of Qin took a great leap and became the strongest and was feared by all the other states.

At the time when Xiang Shaolong escaped and traveled the long journey from Handan to Xianyang, the Qins were just enjoying the fruits of Shang Yang's reforms.

Xianyang is located south of Mount Jiuji and north of River Wei. Hence it's also known as Wei City.

Together with his pretty wife Wu Tingfang and leading Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and more than a thousand family warriors, Xiang Shaolong brought them into Qin and received a warm welcome from the leader of the border patrol, who quickly sent someone to report back to Xianyang and also prepared 5 huge ships so that they need not make the arduous journey through forests and mountains. They disembarked on the northern bank of Xianyang where Wu Yingyuan, together with the family warriors and Zhao Qian, as well as Lu Buwei's number one subordinate Tu Xian, are already waiting. The scene was magnificent.

Wu Tingfang was reunited with her father and they were both ecstatic, feeling as if they have been parted a long time; at the same time they remembered how Master Wu had committed suicide heroically and all the different emotions were mixed.

Xiao Yuetan and another youth whose dressing looks like a military advisor accompanied Tu Xian as they came forward to welcome Xiang Shaolong.

This Tu Xian is tall and thin and looks to be about 30 years of age. He's very sturdily built, tanned and nimble, his movements seems to have an air of overwhelming power and his eyes energetic. With a horse like face, he's not considered handsome but he does have a strong, manly aura and charisma.

He took a huge step forward, pulled Xiang Shaolong's sleeve and said with a long laugh, "Tu Xian is extremely lucky to be finally able to meet such an extraordinary person whom I've admired for so long. Besides Xiang Shaolong, who else can accomplish such a historic task?"

Xiang Shaolong doesn't really know how to react to such an enthusiastic welcome and hurriedly expressed his modesty. At the same time he thought that this is the honeymoon period between Lu Buwei and the Wu family, so Tu Xian must have been instructed by Lu Buwei to take good care of them.

Tu Xian was introduced to Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo one by one and his reaction was enthusiastic and warm.

At this time Jing Jun darted out from some obscure place. After being apart for so long and now reunited, everyone were overjoyed.

Xiao Yuetan behaved as if he's an old friend and introduced that youth to Xiang Shaolong, "This is a famous man from Chu, Mister Li Si. He is now Big Master's She Ren."

She Ren means houseguest.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking that the name 'Li Si' sounded extremely

familiar. He suddenly remembered and exclaimed, “So it’s that Mister Li Si who has the grand ambition of helping a great ruler conquer the world!”

Li Si’s body trembled as he lowered his head and said, “Mister Xiang must be joking. I can’t call this a grand ambition. I only hope that I can make good use of my abilities under the leadership of Premier Lu and will be contented if I can accomplish that!”

A puzzled look flashed past Xiao Yuetan’s face. He quietly thought that when he introduced Li Si as a famous man from Chu, it’s just out of courtesy. The truth is Li Si is a nobody, just that he is a smooth talker and Lu Buwei has some liking for him. He had asked to follow them today so that he can witness Xiang Shaolong’s glory, so why did Xiang Shaolong seem that he has long heard of this name? He can’t help but ask, “Where has Shaolong heard about Mister Li?”

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed himself, he can’t possibly tell Xiao Yuetan that he got to know about Li Si from the movie ‘Emperor Qin’. He quickly changed the topic and asked, “Has Master Lu become the Premier?”

Tu Xian went to Xiang Shaolong and said with gratitude, “Master Lu has instructed me to clearly express his gratitude towards Old Master Wu, Master Yingyuan and Shaolong. If Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng did not return to Xianyang safely, things might have been totally different. Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng has been praising Shaolong in front of his Majesty and Master Lu and his Majesty is going to throw a feast for you tomorrow night so that you will have some time to rest. We’ll all be one family in future.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly to himself that this all sounds very nice but in fact they just want to trick him into becoming Lu Buwei's lackey.

He has long been sick and tired of politics and the fight for power and has no interest at all in the power struggle between the outsider Lu Buwei and the local royalty, so he secretly came to a decision.

Just looking at the Wu family's new residence in Xianyang, made up of 12 courtyards, one knows just how importantly the Qins is regarding the Wu family and the love King Zhuangxiang has towards Zhu Ji and Ying Zheng, who is actually Xiao Pan in disguise, and his trust towards Lu Buwei.

Although the new Wu residence cannot be compared to the Wu family stockade in Handan in terms of size and grandeur, but it's situated near the Palace in Xianyang in an area where all the highly ranked officials stay in. On a trotting horse, one can reach the main entrance of Xianyang Palace in a short span of time.

Xianyang is split into the inner and outer city.

The inner city is mainly made up of Xianyang Palace situated north of River Wei and Xinle Palace south of Weinan, spanning over the River Wei and is joined by a bridge about 280 steps long, forming a majestic cluster of Palaces and the scale is far greater than what the palaces in Handan or Daliang can achieve.

The 2 Palaces looked majestic and tall, looking as if it's almost reaching the sky, and one can imagine a ruler descending to earth from Heaven.

The outer city is more than 10 times bigger than the inner city where the commoners reside in where trade is flourishing with a wide variety of goods at good prices.

When Xiang Shaolong's party went past the market east of the city, they witnessed the sale of various animal products like meat, leather, veins, horns, fats etc. There were also handmade products from ceramic, wood, metal, cloth etc. The range of products far surpassed what Zhao and Wei can offer, obviously there is a direct relation between the power of the state and its economy.

According to Tu Xian, who was traveling in the same carriage as them, the commerce in Xianyang is split into private and official commerce. The government has set up procedures and officials to look after market trading to check and encourage trade expansion. For example officials in charge of salt, metal, handicraft as well as the Minister over the Masses, Minister of Horses, Minister of Works, Minister of Cultivation etc oversees the specifications, quantity and production of the products and all these reflects the Qin's strong economic power.

On the way to the Wu family's new residence, they saw that the dressing of the people are not as bright or grand as those in Wei and Zhao but the population is even more than Daliang, and of course Handan can't even be compared to them.

It was a pleasant change for Xiang Shaolong as he secretly thought that this should be the scale of a strong country.

Most of the passersby were armed and has the air of fighters, something that Wei and Zhao cannot be a match against.

After arriving at the square in front of the Wu family's residence, Tu Xian and the rest bid their farewells and before Li Si left, he secretly indicated to Xiang Shaolong that he would like to come and visit him tomorrow morning. After Xiang Shaolong agreed wholeheartedly, Li Si left looking a little bewildered.

Everyone in the Wu residence came to the main door to welcome this group of We family heroes, especially Xiang Shaolong, who is like a star in the Wu family and idolized.

Wu Yingyuan arranged 4 groups of houses as temporary housing for the men as most of them will start on their journey tomorrow morning to the large farm at the outskirts north of Xianyang. Because the state of Qin is so big but under populated, therefore the scale of the farms can be even bigger than before.

It was only after Xiang Shaolong dealt with the congratulations from the clan can Chunying and the other maids were able to surround him with Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian and bring him to his new Hidden Dragon Abode.

Ting Fangshi was unable to take the difficult journey and had fallen ill and Xiang Shaolong was so alarmed that he hurried to her room.

His love has lost much weight and her countenance pale, She fell sick partly because she was worried about Xiang Shaolong and now that he is back, she hugged him and cried with joy. By dinnertime, she was in better spirits and

was able to get down from her bed.

Looking at how happy Chunying and the other women were, Xiang Shaolong's worries were all gone as he embraced Ting Fangshi and Zhao Qian's trim waists and asked happily, "Who will accompany me tonight?"

The 2 girls blushed prettily, naturally they both would like to be with him.

Wu Tingfang said with a smile, "Why don't the 3 of us accompany you! I'm just afraid you won't be able to handle it."

Zhao Qian added with a giggle, "What about the other 6 maids? Let's see how you'll handle it?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at Chunying and the other 3 maids and asked bewilderedly, "How can there be 6?"

Ting Fangshi said with a smile, "You forgot about Princess Qian's Cuitong and Cuilu?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "Didn't they stay behind in Handan?"

Zhao Qian pouted, "You forgot about them! Luckily I told Master Tao to secretly bring them out amidst the chaos. They arrived in Xianyang 10 days earlier than you."

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed, "Why don't you ask them to quickly see me?"

Zhao Qian called out and 2 pretty maids ran out from the inner hall and collapsed in front of Xiang Shaolong and started crying uncontrollably.

Xiang Shaolong felt apologetic that he has forgotten about them and felt really sorry for them. He got up and helped them to their feet and after consoling them, he went to the grand hall of the main building to have dinner with Wu Yingyuan. Tao Fang, Wu Zhuo, Teng Yi and Jing Jun were also there.

After a round of drinks and congratulatory words, Wu Yingyuan thanked him earnestly, "It's all thanks to everyone here who worked and fought together without fear of their own lives that our Wu family can have a chance to survive."

Tao Fang added, "This time we can really settle down in peace. After the Empress and the Crown Prince returned to Xianyang, Master Lu was immediately appointed as the Premier. If he makes another military contribution, he will be appointed as a Duke or Marquis and with the Wu family having such a huge backing, Old Master will be able to rest in peace in Heaven."

With the mention of Master Wu and his wives, concubines, maids and servants who chose to perish with him, everyone became somber.

Wu Yingyuan said through gritted teeth, "Premier Lu will certainly collect this blood debt for us. Supervisor Tu told me in private that the Premier already has plans to attack Zhao and hopes that Shaolong can lead it."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting. Honestly, his main enemy is Zhao

Mu, the King of Zhao is at most just an accomplice. It is not his wish to lead an army to destroy the cities in Zhao and bring misfortune to the people.

He deeply felt the revulsion towards offensive wars.

There's another bigger problem. He must not become Lu Buwei's lackey no matter what, because in history, Emperor Qin was on bad terms with Lu Buwei 10 years after he ascended the throne, so how can he stand on Lu Buwei's side?

But it seems that everyone in the Wu family has long regarded Lu Buwei as their new Master and looked as if they are going to live and die with him. He can't possibly tell them how history will turn out and knows there's no way he can make them believe him. This is indeed an extremely bothersome problem.

He sighed and said, "The King of Qin has appointed Master Lu as Premier, didn't the royalty and officials in Qin have any objections?"

Wu Yingyuan saw that he didn't seem very concerned that Lu Buiwei is about to hand him an important task and looked at him in puzzlement before adding, "Not only were there objections, their reactions were very vehement as well." He paused and continued "Ever since the outsider Shang Yang, the Qins have been very intense about their prejudice against outsiders. Later, in order to deal with the Union* set up deal with the Qins and to avoid being attacked by the 6 states in the east, they had no choice but to use Zhang Yi to deal with the Union. Later they also relied heavily on Fan Sui and used his strategy of attacking those close to them and having cordial relations with

states further from them to deal with the Union of the 6 states. We can say that it's only when they had no other choice did they make use of talents from other states to help them."

*Union – Collection of the 6 states Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Han and Wei who joined forces to fight against Qin

He sighed again and said, "But after Bai Qi forced to commit suicide by King Zhaoxiang, the Qin military were very displeased and they finally forced Fan Sui to lose his official post and the prejudice towards outsiders were reinforced again. Although we have Qin blood in us, we're still being regarded as outsiders and under Master Lu. Therefore we must help Master Lu with all our efforts, otherwise if he falls, we won't have it easy as well."

Naturally the last few words were meant as a reminder to Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong thought of Mei Canniang and a wave of sadness came over him as he hugged Ting Fangshi and fell onto the bed. He pulled her outer robe aside, revealing her heaving bosom which is still wrapped up in her white inner robe to his eyes.

A mesmerizing fragrance wafted into his nose, her ample bosom can be seen from the loosened collar.

Xiang Shaolong buried his face in her chest as his tightly wound emotions relaxed and at the same time he felt the weariness towards fights and revenge. He only hopes that he can retire to some peaceful woods in future together with Ji Yanran and Mei Canniang as well and live a life with his loved

ones that even immortals would be envious of.

In his mind an image of flowing rivers, green grass, lush woods, high mountains and clear water surfaced.

What he wants is not grand clothes and sumptuous feasts, but a life back to nature and hard work.

In this under populated world, to find a paradise on earth and start his own farm to grow some crops while his ladies will rear ducks as he fished and hunted. He'll be contented if he can live such a life until his death.

Ting Fangshi's pretty face reddened, her eyes closed tightly, her breathing heavy as she moaned daintily, totally enrapturing his soul. Obviously she is in the mood for love, which is insatiable.

Xiang Shaolong is not in the hurry to possess her. He thought of the primitive jungles they passed on the way here, there were heavy fog, thousand feet tall waterfalls and great lakes. His imagination soared and he was secretly determined that he will certainly live the rest of his life in the forests one day.

To someone from the 21st century, this type of lifestyle is the most alluring.

Ting Fangshi forced her pretty eyes to open, her fiery and sultry eyes blaming him for taking his time to join with her.

Xiang Shaolong was intoxicated in both body and mind as he forgot everything else and concentrated all his energy into her mesmerizing body.

Chapter 2

Dinner Feast at the Qin Palace

Sweet voices roused him up from his deep sleep and he opened his eyes. The sun is already rising and he sat up suddenly.

The pretty Princess Zhao Qian was startled, and she said with her hand covering her smile, “The 3 of us have lost, we all thought that you won’t be able to get up.” Her pretty face blushed with embarrassment as she finished her words, obviously she remembered the exciting ‘battle’ they had last night.

Xiang Shaolong was reminded of this by her and he tried flexing his body and realized that he is still feeling energetic. He laughed loudly and threw Zhao Qian onto the bed with a hug and said, “Let’s do it one more time with obedient Qian’er!”

Zhao Qian tried to resist but her body went soft and she did not have the strength to get up as she moaned, “Mister Li Si from the Premier’s Residence has come to look for you!”

Xiang Shaolong remembered the appointment Li Si made with him secretly yesterday and sighed. He put his hands into Zhao Qian’s robes and groped around first before he got up and let his wives and pretty maids help him wash and change. He did not even have to move a finger and everything has been done for him. He was thinking of how he should get the 2 pretty maids

Cuitong and Cuilu up the bed as well and can't help but laugh to himself that he has not changed at all in the sense that he still likes to try out new things like all men.

Li Si was waiting for him at the inner hall, looking calm, or at least that is the way he looked on the surface.

After making some small talk and Qiuying had served them tea and snacks, Li Si went straight to the point, "Where has Mister Xiang heard about my name, why do you seem so familiar about me?"

Xiang Shaolong had asked Tao Fang last night about the background of this famous official who will help Emperor Qin unite the 6 states in future and found out that he is Han Fei's Junior Brother and wanted to lie and say that he heard about him from Han Fei. But he thought that there may be a day where his lie will be exposed so he gave up the idea. He smiled and asked, "Has Mister Li ever heard about such a thing called fate?"

Li Si was puzzled, "What is fate?"

It was only during the Han Dynasty that Buddhism which expounds on 'Fate' came to China, so naturally Li Si does not understand what Xiang Shaolong is saying at all.

Xiang Shaolong took a sip of hot tea before explaining, "Fate is like an invisible hand, which will inevitably join different people together no matter how different their background, how far apart they are, into friends, rulers and subordinates, or maybe husbands and wives or masters and servants.

This is called fate.”

Li Si looked surprised and he thought over it for a while before nodding his head, “I did not expect that not only is Mister Xiang’s sword skill famous in the world, your ideas are thought provoking as well. I just wonder what has this got to do with Mister knowing about me?”

Xiang Shaolong replied nonchalantly, “It’s very difficult to explain what fate is. Although it’s the first time I met you, it feels as if I have long known about your aspirations so I just blurted those words out. Or maybe it’s because I have heard of Brother Li’s tutelage under Xun Zi!”

Li Si furrowed his brows. Although he is Xun Zi’s disciple, their philosophies are far apart. He was about to speak further when Xiang Shaolong changed the subject, “What are your views on ruling a country?”

Li Si was stunned for a moment. If it was King Zhuangxiang who was asking him this question, he’ll certainly be pouring out his views. But not only does Xiang Shaolong not have an official post, he is also under Lu Buwei’s faction. If he were to speak so closely to his heart to someone he has just made an acquaintance of and revealed all that he knows, he may get into trouble. He can’t help but hesitate.

After he came to Xianyang, although he had a few in depth talks with Lu Buwei and Lu Buwei has also expressed his admiration towards him, but he can tell that not only is Lu Buwei extremely ambitious but overbearing as well and will get into trouble sooner or later. Besides, he was feeling secretly bothered as their views on ruling a country is vastly different from each other

so it'll be very difficult for him to be recognized or entrusted with heavy responsibility.

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Mister does not want to be just a small fry whom no one bothers!"

Ji Si was startled and hurriedly said, "Mister Xiang must be joking!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a straight face, "In order to accomplish great things, then one must take great risks. If Mister cannot put aside your fears for your life, then our conversation today will end here and we will not breath a word about this to anyone else in future, how about it?"

Li Si looked at him intensely for a moment, and felt that Xiang Shaolong shows a sincerity that can move others. He felt a burning passion in his heart as he threw all caution to the wind and said, "I wonder what views and suggestion Mister Xiang has?"

Xiang Shaolong asked, "In Mister Li's opinion, how does the future bode for Premier Lu?"

Li Si's expression changed slightly as he exhaled a long breath and said with a sigh, "Mister Xiang is making it difficult for me."

Xiang Shaolong understands the difficult position he is in and asked gently, "What work is Mister Li doing now in the Lu Residence?"

Li Si replied frankly, "I am helping Premier Lu write his 'Lu Chronicles'

according to his instructions. The Premier hopes that with this book he can come up with a complete philosophy and reforms for ruling the country. Hei! I am just one of his many subordinates, the word 'helping' is a bit of an exaggeration."

Xiang Shaolong is not a historian and this is the first time he has heard about this and asked in puzzlement, "So there's actually such a happening. I wonder what are the new ideas on ruling a country in the book?"

A look of disdain appeared slightly on Li Si's face as he said calmly, "What kind of new ideas can he have? It's mainly a collection of the essence of the philosophies of others before, who supports the idea of 'Divinity of Heaven', which means that one can only rule the world well if he follows the natural order of heaven and earth. The ruler and subjects will walk their own path and not interfere with one another. A ruler should rule the country with benevolence and reflect on himself from time to time, seeking virtuosity constantly until in the end, the ideal state of having nothing to govern is achieved."

Xiang Shaolong saw that he was clear on his reasoning and was secretly impressed and asked gently, "Does Mister think that Premier's ideals will work?"

Li Si dare not reply him at all and asked instead, "What does Mister Xiang think?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that if he doesn't show off a little, he will be looked down upon by this learned, ambitious and younger man, so he said coolly,

“Premier Lu is governing the Qin politics as a Han, and places more trust on people from Zhao, Wei and Han. The Empress who was his companion is from Zhao as well. On top of that, ever since Shang Yang’s reforms, Qin has been using legalism and militarism to govern the country, which is a polar opposite of Premier Lu’s ideals. There is no where the 2 can blend at all and as for what will happen in future, I hope that Mister can advice me.”

Li Si slapped the table and stood up, saying, “With such a talent like Mister Xiang in Qin, I should return to my hometown and be a farmer instead.”

Xiang Shaolong grabbed his arm and pulled him back onto the chair and said earnestly, “Mister is exaggerating. Firstly I know nothing at all about ruling a country but most importantly I have no interest in an official career. Everything that I have done in the past is for survival and not fame. There will come a day when I will retire to the woods and not bother myself with worldly affairs. Whether Qin can unify the 6 states will have to depend on you.”

Li Si was momentarily stunned and secretly thought that these words would be more appropriate if King Zhuangxiang told it to him. Although King Zhuangxiang was impressed with Xiang Shaolong, he is not a wise ruler at all and follows Lu Buwei’s advice on everything. With the current situation, who else can outsiders like them rely on other than Lu Buwei? But Xiang Shaolong seems to imply that there is a new leader, which is really incomprehensible to him.

Xiang Shaolong put his hand on his shoulder and said with a smile, “Mister Li will understand my words in future, just rest assured and stay in Xianyang!

This is the only place you can expand your ambition.”

After Li Si bid his farewell, Xiang Shaolong went to look for Teng Yi for breakfast.

During the meal Teng Yi asked, “What are your plans for the future?”

Naturally Xiang Shaolong will have his plans, which is based on the information he gathered from the movie ‘Emperor Qin’. Help set a solid foundation for the fake Yingzheng, Xiao Pan, so that he can handle Lu Buwei’s attempt to wrestle power in future and the appearances of evil officials.

Now that he has found Li Si, there is still the father and son Wang Jiang and Wang Bi. They are all famed generals who will help Emperor Qin unite the world in future. With these 3 helping Xiao Pan, he can retire to the woods in peace.

He gave a relaxed sigh as he sat back on the chair and stretched, “To tell the truth, I have no great ambitions at all. After I kill Zhao Mu, I will move to one of the Wu family’s farm far away and live a secluded life. I’ll be contented with hunting or fishing during my free time.”

Teng Yi revealed a small trace of a rare smile and said nonchalantly, “If you can do that, I’ll go hunting with you.”

At this time Jing Jun rushed in like a gust of wind and said energetically, “Come! Let me be the guide and show you 2 big brothers the glorious sights of Xianyang.”

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, “Whom have you been making hanging out with recently?”

Jing Jun sat down on the rug opposite them and replied excitedly, “Of course it’s the people from the Premier’s residence. It’s so exciting here, there are fights and injuries everyday. Just a few days ago some swordsmen from the Premier’s residence were ambushed in the largest officials brother in Xianyang, with 3 dead and 7 injured. Those thieves who made the sneak attack were lucky that I was away at the temple north of river Wei to peek at those ladies offering prayers. Otherwise, there won’t be so many dead and injured.”

Xiang Shaolong and Tengyi exchanged looks, both secretly alarmed. This lad is young and rash and may cause trouble.

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, “Don’t the Qins value law and legalism? How can there be fights?”

Teng Ji replied smugly, “Now Xianyang is in a mess, who can be bothered to interfere. Especially when it involves the people of the Left and Right Premier’s residences, no one dares to intervene.”

Xiang Shaolong said sternly, “You better not cause any trouble these few days. Once we are clear about the situation, we’ll go back to Zhao immediately to deal with Zhao Mu, understand?”

Jing Jun was ecstatic and bowed respectfully, “Xiao Jun understands. Great! I can get Zhao Zhi back here.”

Teng Yi reprimanded in a low voice, “You are getting more and more ridiculous!”

Jing Jun fears Teng Yi the most and was so frightened he immediately bowed down and dared not make a sound.

Teng Yi sighed and said to Xiang Shaolong, “Shaolong! This lad is still young and doesn’t understand the severity of the situation. I will take him in hand, you don’t have to worry.”

Xiang Shaolong said with a laugh, “Why would I blame him?”

Jing Jun said, “Xiao Jun respects both brothers the most!”

Teng Yi shouted, “Shut up!” He made an eye signal at Xiang Shaolong, signifying that he wants to reprimand Jing Jun in private.

Xiang Shaolong understood his meaning and went back to Hidden Dragon Abode alone. He has not even stepped through the door when he heard the cheers and laughs of the ladies near the well. He hurried over for a look and it turned out that his wives and maids have all changed into light and short dresses and happily playing ball while Ting Fangshi sat at a side and watched with a smile.

Chunying and Xiaying rushed forward and dragged him into the game.

This day was therefore spent amidst such happy atmosphere. At dusk, Wu Yingyuan asked someone to invite him over so that they can go to the Palace

together for the feast.

When he thought of how he will soon be meeting this famous Lu Buwei who can affect the history of the warring states, Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel a little nervous.

How could he have expected that just a fight at 'Black Leopard Bar' can totally change his fate!

The horse carriage drove slowly into the grand entrance, past a round shaped corridor, into the square in front of the main hall.

There were rest areas for soldiers on both sides of the main door, where there are 2 camps of troops under the command of the Military Official. After some routine questionings, they allowed the 12 riders who were protecting Xiang and Wu's carriages into the inner palace.

Although Xianyang Palace is a few times larger, its layout is the same as the Zhao Palace where it's 'front court back rest' format. The outer part is where the King of Qin deal with state matters and hold court, the inner part is where the King and his concubines and children's bedrooms are.

The 3 main halls in the front part looked grand and majestic, the Premier Hall and various departments are on each side; the inner part consisted mainly of the King of Qin and the Empress's 3 back palaces, and on the right and left side there are the 6 Eastern Palaces and 6 Western Palaces, where the Empress Dowager, Concubines and various Princes reside in.

Xiang Shaolong was sightseeing along the way and saw halls, courtyards, woods, pavilions, platforms, corridors etc, which looked solemn yet respectable, something that the Zhao Palace cannot be compared to.

The construction of the buildings at the inner court is even more diversified and the layout compact with groups of buildings surrounding a courtyard with walls surrounding them and the different sections separated by tall walls. If there's no one to lead the way, being lost is no big surprise.

Once he thought that Xiao Pan will one day become the master of this place, and he was the one who single-handedly facilitated all this, Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel pride and a sense of achievement.

King Zhuangxiang's feast is held at the 'Health Cultivating Palace' at the back, which is also the inner Palace's most grand wooden building, a 3 storey tall building. On the tall platform there are 2 pavilion looking buildings and on each side of these buildings and the lower platform there are each 10 rooms of different sizes. There are bedrooms, rest areas, bathrooms etc which are connected by corridors. There are drawings on the walls and the steps on the corridors are carved with dragons and phoenixes, and the whole place looked grand and magnificent.

The horse carriage stopped at the square and Lu Buwei had specifically told his housekeeper Mister Tu to welcome them there. Naturally he was especially happy and courteous when he saw them.

As they walked up the long steps, Tu Xian said in a low voice, "Besides Premier Lu, Lord Yangquan is also here tonight. This person thinks that he has

made a great contribution to his Majesty in the past and is extremely proud and overbearing. Even his Majesty and Premier Lu have to give in to him a little, the 2 of you will have to handle him carefully.”

Wu Yingyuan saw how forthright he was towards them, obviously he is regarding them as family and was secretly overjoyed as he kept on agreeing.

Xiang Shaolong thought that there will come a day when they have to oppose Lu Buwei and was secretly sighing instead.

Maybe this is the pain one has to suffer for knowing the future and he can't help but feel all the more determined to retire away from the world.

They had just stepped into the door when they heard a long laugh and saw a grandly dressed man whose body shape and limbs are a lot more stout than others striding towards them. He was wearing a tall hat with feathers and ornaments on it and the feathers flapped as he walked, boosting the power he exuded.

This person is about 40 years old with a square face and big ears. He looks a little unique, and his eyes a little too thin and long but shining, giving others the impression that he is profound and formidable.

Wu Yingyuan hurriedly pulled Xiang Shaolong to kneel and pay his respects, crying out Premier Lu.

Before they were on their knees, Lu Buwei has already dashed forward to help them up, his lighted eyes landed on Xiang Shaolong as he exclaimed in

surprise, “No wonder Empress Ji and Mister Xiao kept complimenting Xiang Shaolong. I, Lu Buwei, have traveled the world and it’s the first time I’ve seen such a talent like Shaolong.”

His loud booming voice reverberated in the hall.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Lu Buwei is only a little shorter than him but his aura is intense. He was secretly impressed and hurriedly said humbly, “Premier, you flatter me!”

He sneaked a peek and saw that besides the 3 tables at the top level, there are 2 other tables each on the left and right side of the hall and next to each table stood 2 palace maids. He heaved a sigh of relief as he need not handle so many people and was naturally a lot more relaxed.

Lu Buwei did not put on the airs of a Premier at all as his left and right hand grabbed theirs and pulled them towards the table on the right at the top level as he said quietly in Xiang Shaolong’s ears, “I was just worrying that I have the army but no general and it’s good that Shaolong is here, I no longer have to worry I won’t accomplish great things.” And he chortled.

Wu Yingyuan who was on the other side said happily, “We will have to depend on Premier to promote us.”

However Xiang Shaolong is secretly lamenting. Man have feelings and with Lu Buwei having such high regard for him, how will he be able to extract himself from all these and retire to a life in the farm?

At this time 3 people came to their table and Lu Buwei waved his hand and dismissed the maids first before saying in a low voice, "I have already arranged with his Majesty to let Shaolong become the Vice-General to General Meng Ao. General Meng is originally from the state of Qi but has always been ostracized by the local generals ever since he came to Qin. He was depressed that he was unable to use his abilities. In fact his military strategies are something no one in Qin can compare with and if he has Shaolong's help and make great military contributions, I will certainly reward both of you well."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei is formidable to use such a method to pull him over to his side, direct and forceful, how can anyone not work for him wholeheartedly. He pretended to be touched before saying, "Premier regards Shaolong so highly, I am willing to die for you with no hesitation at all. The problem is Shaolong's greatest enemy Zhao Mu is still living. As long as I am unable to tear that fiend to pieces, it's difficult for me to put my mind on other matters."

Lu Buwei grabbed his arm tightly as his eyes flashed and said, "I can't wait to skin him and break his bones as well. Shaolong just go ahead and do whatever you want, I will support you in everything. After you get his head, remember to bring it back to Xianyang so that his Majesty and I can have a look at it!"

It's only now that Xiang Shaolong fully have a taste of Lu Buwei's formidability. No wonder he can become the Right Premier of the strongest state in the world although he is only a merchant.

Also, he could deduce with just those few words he said that he was planning to sneak back into Handan to assassinate Zhao Mu. From this it can be seen how quickly and astutely his mind works.

The Door Official cried out, “General Meng Ao arrives!”

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to blurt out, “To speak of Cao Cao and here he comes.”*, luckily he remembered that Cao Cao has not been born yet and hurriedly kept his words.

(*Chinese idiom – similar meaning to speak of the devil)

Lu Buwei turned around and said with a loud laugh, “What can be happier than meeting an old friend?”

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Yingyuan looked towards the front door and saw a tall and skinny man dressed in brocade robes and striding into the hall with big steps, bowing with respect from far away as he said, “Meng Ao pays his respect to Premier Lu!”

With his unique way of walking, Lu Buwei stepped forward and put his arms around Meng Ao warmly and walked towards Wu and Xiang.

This Meng Ao has a longish face, about 40 odd years old, tanned with a weather beaten face. His brows looked as if they are frequently furrowed but his eyes are alert, which gives others the feeling that he is extraordinary. His body is very healthy and nimble, obviously he could maintain this top form due to the amount of exercise he gets.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei has an eye for talent, therefore this Meng Ao is definitely a man of ability.

Meng Ao and Wu Yingyuan are already acquainted with each other and after exchanging greetings, his sharp eyes landed on Xiang Shaolong's face.

Xiang Shaolong did not want to exchange looks with him so he hurriedly bowed to show his respect.

Lu Buwei introduced the both of them.

Meng Ao obviously doesn't really know how to socialize, his tense face has no smile at all as he said a little stiffly, "Glad to meet you!"

Wu Yingyuan laughed, "That lad Jing Jun has just been here for a few days but has already made friends with General Meng Ao's sons and they have been going to the outskirts to hunt and have fun!"

Lu Buwei complimented, "That lad is indeed skilled. He's only been in Xianyang for such a short time but he has already defeated 3 famous local swordsmen. However he concedes to no one except Shaolong, making all of us itch to witness Shaolong's ultimate swordplay."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong realize that Jing Jun has been doing all these things and he doesn't know whether to be happy or worried. It seems that for the time being he has no choice but to stand on Lu Buwei's side.

Meng Ao heard his sons being mentioned and revealed a trace of a rare smile

and said, "Let's see when Shaolong is free, please come to my house. Xiaowu and Xiaotian both idolize Shaolong a lot!"

Before Xiang Shaolong has a chance to answer, the Door Official cried out again, "Left Premier Lord Yangquan, Great General Wang He arrives!"

Meng Ao's smile immediately disappeared while Lu Buwei gave a cold snort. It seems that the battle between the new and old, outsiders and locals have reached a stage when they don't even try to appear cordial.

Xiang Shaolong looked towards the main door and saw a short, fat man wearing a grand robe together with a big and stout man wearing battle robes walking over with large steps and heads held high.

The Qin's style is really different from the Zhaos. There are no family warriors surrounding them or a band welcoming them. Everything is simpler and this made Xiang Shaolong more relaxed.

Xiang Shaolong secretly found it funny that both Lu Buwei the Right Premier and Lord Yangquan the Left Premier brought with them a general to the feast and this is obviously not a coincidence but an arrangement by the King of Qin to ensure that the power on both sides are balanced.

But this Wang He is an important pillar in Qin while Meng Ao is an unsuccessful general. Obviously Lu Buwei has not gotten the support of the Qin military and this can be his fatal weakness, which is why he is trying so hard to get Xiang Shaolong on his side. Otherwise this materialistic merchant will not be bothered to take even a look at him.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He's gaze fell onto Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Yingyuan hurriedly bowed to show their respect.

Wang He is very magnanimous and smiled in return.

Lord Yangquan looked proud and nodded slightly as he squinted his evil looking eyes surrounded by flesh and said with as cold laugh, "How many days have Commander Xiang been here! If I did not come and attend this feast today, I'm afraid I still won't be able to see you in your glory!"

These words were obviously blaming Xiang Shaolong for not visiting an important person like him after he arrived in Xianyang.

Wu Yingyuan was secretly cursing but on the surface he smiled and said, "My foolish son-in-law arrived only yesterday and I hope Lord Yangquan can be magnanimous about his lapse and not take it to heart."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved instead. This Lord Yangqun's moods are reflected so clearly on his face and he is quite ordinary, definitely not Lu Buwei's match. Instead it is Wang He who is more formidable.

"Dang!"

A sound was heard.

18 stout and broad warriors with long spears came into the hall from the back hall in neat lines and stood on both sides.

Next, sounds of close footsteps coming down the stairs could be heard from behind the hall.

Xiang Shaolong then realized that King Zhuangxiang had been in the hall upstairs all along and only came down to host the feast when he was informed that all the guests have arrived.

At the same time he guessed that Lu Buwei was upstairs earlier in a secret discussion with King Zhuangxiang and from this one can see how close their relationship is.

Everyone split into 2 sides and knelt to welcome the arrival of King Zhuangxiang.

Firstly 4 guards with serious expressions stepped out, followed by 8 pretty young palace maids. They are dressed mainly in purple, with red and blue sleeves, which looked a little dowdy as compared to the embroidered and grand dresses of the palace maids in Zhao and Wei.

They were split into 2 groups, with 2 men and 4 women in each group, standing in 2 straight lines looking very serious.

The sounds of accessories clanking could be heard.

A pretty lady with the bearing of royalty and wearing long robes holding the hand of a splendidly dressed child about 10 years of age walked in slowly.

Xiaong Shaolong peeked and thought that it was Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan but

upon close look, he realized his mistake.

At this time the servant cried out, “Lady Xiuli, Prince Cheng Chongqiao arrives!”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, so this is the prince that Lord Yangquan is supporting. That lady’s beauty is extraordinary, she should be a concubine that King Zhuangxiang appointed after his return to Qin from Handan. For her and her son to be able to attend this feast, it means that she has the ability to vie with Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan. Obviously King Zhuangxiang is smitten with her too, otherwise she would have been banished to the cold palace.

The sounds of accessories can be heard again and Xiang Shaolong’s eyes brightened immediately.

Zhu Ji was in a short dress with gold embroidered floral patterns which dazzled, with another floor length long dress beneath. Together with her coiffed hair, she walked lightly like a willow tree swaying in the breeze, showing off her slender waist, lush bottom and natural allure. Immediately she wins that Lady Xiuli hands down.

With one hand holding her dress and the other holding Xiao Pan, who is dressed mainly in black, she looked especially enchanting.

Xiang Shaolong remembered how he had once held her under the bedcovers and talked, that was another experience altogether. He lowered his head to avoid eye contact with her.

The servant announced, “Empress Ji, Crown Prince Zheng arrives.”

2 pairs of mother and son came to the side of the tables and knelt down to await the arrival of King Zhuangxiang.

Xiao Pan’s eyes did not shift, not even taking a single look at Xiang Shaolong at all.

Xiang Shaolong secretly complimented him. He had in the past instructed Xiao Pan not to treat him any differently, otherwise it may arouse the suspicions of Zhu Ji or other people.

The 4 guards cried out in unison, “His Majesty arrives!”

Xiang Shaolong dared not peek any longer and can only try to imagine what he could have looked like.

A gentle, melodious and calm voice rang out in front, “Everyone, rise!”

Everyone cried out in unison, “Thank you, Your Majesty!”

Xiang Shaolong rose together with everyone else and lifted his head for a look, and coincidentally came eye to eye with King Zhuangxiang who was observing him.

This King of Qin who was once held hostage in Handan is about 40 years old, tall and thin, and seems to look a little like a Taoist. His skin is as fair as a lady, his face pale but has a rare scholarly charisma with long, slender fingers.

He gives others a feeling that he is from a good family background with the air of someone from a large family. A pity that his eyes doesn't seem alert enough, otherwise he would have outstanding magnetism.

He was wearing a long square board on the top of his head that made him look even more impressive as a ruler.

Naturally he was wearing a ruler's robes, with a black base and yellow patterns with gold edges, looking solemn and grand.

He saw that Xiang Shaolong is far better than other people in terms of body size and spirit, King Zhuangxiang's eyes lit up and the corners of his lips revealed a trace of a gentle smile as he said softly, "Only an extraordinary person can accomplish extraordinary things. Shaolong, you have not disappointed me."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect King Zhuangxiang to address him directly by his name and in such a friendly tone as well, and he hurriedly expressed his thanks.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes fell on Wu Yingyuan and he said gently, "To have such a son-in-law, what more can Mister Wu ask for. It is predictable that the Wu family will have great glory in future because of Shaolong."

Wu Yingyuan expressed his thanks happily.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He exchanged a look, both can see the unhappiness in the other's eyes.

King Zhuangxiang looked at everyone and said calmly, “Everyone be seated!”

The drum sounded again.

Another 18 guards walked out from inside and together with the previous guards, formed into teams of 9 and they went to their positions behind the tables and stood guard.

Everyone went to stand next to the tables and waited for King Zhuangxiang to be seated, the guards to take their positions and Ladies Xiuli, Zhu Ji and their sons were seated before they dared to sit down.

On the 2 tables on the right, at the upper level, was where Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong was seated, followed by Meng Ao and Wu Yingyuan; on the other side it was entirely different with Lord Yangquan and Wang He each taking a table.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately did not look at Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan to prevent King Zhuangxiang or the others from realizing that he has a special relationship with the ‘mother and son’. This is what is called, ‘Rather be suspected than to prove suspicions correct.’

The palace maids were like butterflies flitting amongst flowers as they served the guests wine and delicacies.

King Zhuangxiang said, “Now that Empress Ji and Crown Prince Zheng has returned to Xianyang safely, I no longer have any worries. Let us have a toast!”

Everyone raised their cups but Lady Xiuli, Lord Yangquan and Wang He's expressions naturally looked a little uneasy.

King Zhuangxiang's eyes landed on where Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan were seated and his gaze became even more gentle and with his melodious voice full of feelings, he said, "My Prince Zheng, Shaolong is your benefactor, aren't you offering a toast to Mister Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong can't help but be charmed by him and he truly felt that his success is not based on luck. King Zhuangxiang was acknowledged by Lu Buwei as a 'rare treasure' while he was down and out and later he was able to move Lady Huayang, who was King Zhaoxiang's favorite then, and she made him her son. In the end he won and became the successor to the throne and all these can be accomplished because of his unique charm. Otherwise, no matter how much money Lu Buwei spends on bribing, it would just be a waste of effort.

Xiao Pan stood up on hearing that and walked to Xiang Shaolong's table.

It's only at this time that the 2 of them had the opportunity to meet eye to eye.

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened immediately, feel of feelings, but luckily he quickly hid what he felt.

Naturally palace maids came up to help pour the wine.

Xiang Shaolong stood up, bowed respectfully with his hands held above his

head as he received the fine wine Xiao Pan handed him and drank it in one gulp.

Xiao Pan has grown more stout, his expression calm. When Xiang Shaolong thought of how he will grandly unite the world in future, he can't help but feel his heart tremble.

The 2 of them went back to their respective seats.

Xiang Shaolong can't help but take another look at Xiao Pan and realized Zhu Ji was looking at him with a smile, her eyes gentle and he was so shocked he quickly lowered his eyes.

After chatting with everyone for a while, King Zhuangxiang's gaze settled on Xiang Shaolong again and he asked calmly, "If we were to attack Handan, destroy Zhao and capture Zhao Mu alive, how much troops does Shaolong think will be needed?"

Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan's eyes lit up at the same time.

Lord Yangquan and Wang He listened intently, waiting to hear his response.

Lu Buwei laughed loudly and said, "Shaolong be brave and speak your mind!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled a little and replied, "With the current situation, we'll only need 20,000 men to attack Handan but to destroy Zhao, even if everyone in Qin were put to work, it's still impossible."

Everyone was shocked.

Lord Yangquan said with a cold laugh, “It’s only been a short time that Commander Xiang is exposed to military warfare, that’s why he expressed such ignorant comments. Would Great General Wang explain these to Commander Xiang so that he won’t continue with his wrong understanding unknowingly.”

He still insisted on addressing him as Commander to remind others that he is just an insignificant and lowly ranked commander, and also to show that he still regards him as an outsider.

King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei’s expressions were initially unhappy upon hearing Xiang Shaolong’s words, then they thought deeper into it.

Zhu Ji on the other hand was smiling slightly, full of confidence in Xiang Shaolong.

Whereas Wu Yingyuan kept making eyes at Xiang Shaolong, hoping that he’ll be careful in his words.

Meng Ao’s eyes lit up, obviously he understood the meaning behind Xiang Shaolong’s words.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Wang He calmly, his eyes shining intensely.

Wang He felt his heart turn cold upon his gaze and became more cautious as he said, “I’d like to ask Mister Xiang to explain why he would have such a

stand.”

Once he said that, King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei, Wu Yingyuan and Lord Yangquan, these 4 men who has no knowledge of military affairs immediately knew that Xiang Shaolong was not speaking nonsense, otherwise Wang He would not show such hesitation.

Xiang Shaolong smiled calmly and said, “After Changping, Zhao indeed suffered great damage and not only was military morale affected, it also greatly affected the confidence of the royalty and officials in the country. But it’s exactly because of this attitude that developed the determination of everyone to defend against the enemy to the death. The defeat of the Yans is proof of that. My suggestion of using 20,000 men to attack Handan is to make use of the opportunity that our Wu family had just evacuated from Zhao and all the beasts in the farms had been poisoned and died. The Zhaos, in this aspect, will be at a loss for now and adding on to the fact that their morale has been beaten, I have the confidence of winning. But this must be a quick battle and take the opportunity that Li Mu and Lian Po are still engaged with the Xiong Nus and Yans so they will be unable to extricate themselves for the time being. We will attack the city and then retreat, for that place is not suitable for a long stay.”

He continued somberly, “If we’re just going to attack the city, we need only 10,000 men but if we want a quick battle with minimal casualties, we will definitely need 20,000 men.”

Wang He was stunned for a moment before saying with a sign, “What Mister Xiang has said is not without reason.”

Xiang Shaolong can't help but like him even more, because he is not someone who will lie thru his teeth.

Meng Ao said solemnly, "I totally agree with Shaolong's words."

Lord Yangquan was so furious that his face was alternating between being fiery red and deathly pale and after exchanging glances with Lady Xiuli, he was at a loss for words.

Zhu Ji laughed delicately and addressed King Zhuangxiang with a flirtatious look, "Your Majesty! I didn't recommend the wrong person! It's the first time the Great General and General Meng shares the same agreement on any matter!"

Once she said that, both Wang He and Meng Ao started feeling embarrassed.

Xiao Pan looked at Xiang Shaolong, feelings of admiration and longing welled up in him.

King Zhuangxiang took a look at Lu Buwei first before he continued smoothly, "Then can Shaolong explain why you said that we will not be able to destroy Zhao even if we use all out resources?"

Wu Yingyuan is the most nervous now. If Xiang Shaolong cannot convince the King of Qin on this matter, that whatever little advantage they gained earlier would be gone as well.

Xiang Shaolong explained, "Although it is said the most important thing in a

war is the country's strength and military power, but relationships with external parties and information is equally important. As the saying goes, the battle is won if one knows the enemy as well as one knows oneself."

Lord Yangquan interrupted, "The Great Qin has never overlooked these 2 aspects. The late King appointed Zhang Yi as Premier and this took care of external relationships and destroyed the unification plans of the 6 states. As for information, we send spies regularly to the various states and have never slackened in this area."

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to despise this senior statesman and asked impolitely, "Can I ask you then, if we were to attack Zhao with all our military resources, what will the reaction of the other states be?"

Lord Yangquan was dumbfounded, because if he does not have the support of actual information, how is he able to answer such a hypothetical question.

Lu Buwei patted Xiang Shaolong's thigh beneath the table to show his happiness that he has managed to put Lord Yangquan down.

Wang He is after all on the same boat as Lord Yangquan so he said, "Indeed this matter cannot be rushed. Let's not talk about Qi and Chu for now, but the other 3 states depend on one another for survival and they will certainly unite and fight against us. Any single one of the states do not have the strength to fight against our Great Qin's thousands of men but if they were to join forces, it'll be a different matter altogether."

By saying this, not only has he helped to intercede for Lord Yangquan, it also

meant that he has affirmed Xiang Shaolong's explanation.

Xiang Shaolong did not allow them to have a chance to take a break and hurriedly added, "If Zhao is under attack, the other states will not just sit and watch. Even if at the beginning they have the intention viewing the fight of 2 tigers while sitting on a mountain, waiting to sweep in once both sides are injured, but once the Zhaos close their Pass to defend themselves from inside and at the same time send troops to cut off our reinforcements paths, the other states will send troops to help sooner or later. By then we will be surrounded by enemies and the situation is not optimistic."

King Zhuangxiang slapped the table and exclaimed, "What a good description 'viewing the fight of 2 tigers while sitting on a mountain', it's the first time I've heard of such an interesting verse."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought to himself, could it be that this verse has not been used during this era yet? After thanking King Zhuangxiang for his compliment, he continued, "Besides, Lord Xinling of Wei is still around and he can influence the other states. If they join forces again, we'll be in even greater danger."

Everyone went silent. 8 years ago, Lord Xinling from Wei, together with the troops from the other states, defeated the Qin army badly at Handan. Everyone still remembered the events as if it just happened and were apprehensive.

King Zhuangxiang sighed, "Then would it mean that we'll just let the fiend Zhao Mu go off scot-free?"

Just with that sentence, he knows that King Zhuangxiang does not have the grand ambition of unifying the world, or else he would have said ‘how do we conquer the 6 states?’ instead.

Xiang Shaolong replied with a straight face, “If the intention is just to capture Zhao Mu, your Majesty need not use a single soldier at all, just leave it all to me.”

Everyone was stunned.

King Zhuangxiang’s spirits rose as he asked, “Is this a boast?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Not a boast at all. I only need half a year to gather information, then I can set off and capture Zhao Mu back alive and kicking to your Majesty and you can do anything you want with him. But most importantly this must be kept a secret, otherwise I’m afraid I won’t be able to come back alive.”

King Zhuangxiang slapped the table and cried out, “Whoever dares to reveal this matter will be executed immediately with no excuse!”

At the same time Lu Buwei sighed next to Xiang Shaolong’s ears, “How can you say that out?”

Xiang Shaolong knows that he’s worried that Lord Yangquan will try to harm him and he put his hand under the table and wrote on his thigh the word ‘fake’. Lu Buwei immediately understood his meaning and looked at him with admiration and approval.

Lord Yangquan lowered his head so that others will not be able to see his happy expression.

Zhu Ji laughed coquettishly and teased King Zhuangxiang, “Zhao Mu alive and kicking, Shaolong really has some interesting phrases. Is your Majesty still in doubt about my suggestion earlier?”

Once everyone heard that, they knew immediately there’s more to this.

Indeed King Zhuangxiang chortled, “I am extremely happy to have this conversation with Shaolong. If we can capture Zhao Mu alive to appease the anger in my heart, he’ll definitely be handsomely rewarded. From now on, Shaolong will be my guest as well as the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutor, to teach Zheng’er martial arts and the art of war.”

Lu Buwei was ecstatic and hurriedly raised his cup to congratulate Xiang Shaolong.

The Crown Prince is the successor to the throne and if one can become his Teacher, when the Crown Prince ascends the throne in future, he will be able to exert the most direct influence. Therefore this is not a minor official post and everyone is eyeing this position.

Lord Yangquan walked out from behind his table and knelt on the floor, beseeching, “Your Majesty, please reconsider. Our Great Qin has been established for hundreds of years and are famed for our fighting ability. All those Grand Tutors who are fit to teach the Crown Princes are the best swordsmen in the country and never has an outsider taken this position.

Besides, Commander Xiang firstly has not made any military contribution and secondly we do not know if his swordplay is really as good as rumored. Why don't your Majesty decide again after Commander Xiang captures Zhao Mu back!"

His words can be considered reasonable, so obviously this person still has some brains but King Zhuangxiang is not listening at all and said unhappily, "How can I possibly judge a person wrongly. We'll just do it this way, there is no need for Left Premier to speak any further,"

Wang He can't help but step out as well and knelt down, "Your Majesty must reconsider, otherwise I'm afraid others will not agree in their hearts."

Once this great general speaks, it's akin to the military in Qin voicing out their objections and although King Zhuangxiang was furious, he can't help but hesitate.

On seeing this, Xiang Shaolong knelt and said, "What Left Premier and Great General said is not unreasonable. Your Majesty, please retract your orders. Let's see if I can capture Zhao Mu first before you decide."

Wu Yingyuan and Zhu Ji secretly thought it's a great pity, and Zhu Ji was secretly lamenting that her chances of getting in touch with Xiang Shaolong has now been reduced.

Whereas Xiao Pan almost felt like giving Lord Yangquan a good beating.

King Zhuangxiang sighed and said, "Officials, please rise."

Lord Yangquan and Wang He knows that he has changed his mind and went back to their tables happily.

Xiang Shaolong walked back to his table calmly.

Wang He saw that he did not seem at all bothered and can't help but feel curious.

Before King Zhuangxiang could speak, Lu Buwei laughed loudly and drew everyone's attention to him.

Lu Buwei said seriously, "How can the position of Crown Prince's Grand Tutor be left empty for more than half a year. Regarding military knowledge, Shaolong has shown his remarkable observations and in both Zhao and Wei, Shaolong managed to overcome enemy troops with a smaller number of men. He also executed Xiao Weimou and his famed has spread throughout the land. As long as Lord Yangquan and Great General invite who they think is the greatest swordsman in our country to have a duel at a later date in front of his Majesty, we'll be able to see immediately who is better."

King Zhuangxiang was overjoyed, "We'll do it this way! All right, let us drink and be merry."

He clapped his hands and a group of dancers floated into the hall immediately to sing and dance but they could not dispel the tense atmosphere hanging in the air.

Both sides were getting ready to make the other side fall badly.

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly to himself, knowing that he is now embroiled in the Qin court's power struggle.

Maybe this is what they refer to as, 'having no choice when one is out in the martial arts realm'.

Chapter 3

News from afar

The following 10 days, Xiang Shaolong spent the most relaxing time ever since he arrived in this ancient era.

Together with his wives and maids, Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Wu Zhuo and the thousand family warriors who followed him from Handan, they went to the Wu family's newly established farm at the outskirts to rest and relax.

The farm is very big and on a fast horse it takes at least 2 hours to ride from one end to the other and it has 18 simple but well equipped houses. They chose a courtyard next to a pretty valley and named it 'Hidden Dragon Courtyard'.

Every morning when they wake up, he will ride with his wives and maids on the open plains and at the same time practice his archery. He also got the 3 highly skilled fighters Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and Jing Jun to duel with him and practice the use of various weapons as a warm up practice for the duel with that still unknown person whom Lord Yangquan and the rest are going to choose.

The 'Elite Soldiers' have expanded to 300 men from the original 77 men and they practice day and night to prepare themselves so that they can be chosen to return to Handan in future to capture Zhao Mu alive.

With a real special task force warrior like Xiang Shaolong heading the unit, this batch of people improved by leaps and bounds and learnt the various spying and tactics used once they have infiltrated the enemy camp.

There are a lot of people in the Wu family and some of them are craftsmen who know how to work with metal. Following Xiang Shaolong's instructions, Wu Zhuo set up a workshop for the blacksmiths and they made secret weapons like climbing hooks and flying needles according to his designs.

Xiang Shaolong also did not forget to meditate according to the instructions on the scroll taken from the Mohist token. Teng Yi was very interested after he found out about this and learnt the technique from him and he practices it with greater effect than Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong might as well just give him the scroll so that he can study the military and sword fighting techniques on the scroll on his own. Their relationship is now even closer than real brothers.

Just as they were enjoying the bliss, Tao Fang came.

Everyone gathered in the hall for a meeting.

Tao Fang exclaimed excitedly, "There's news from Handan and it's really exciting." But he did not immediately continue with his story.

When everyone saw him trying to keep them in suspense, they were so anxious. The only exception was Teng Yi who remained unmoving and calm as usual.

Tao Fang said with a laugh, “Let me tell you one issue at a time! This time the person who was most affected by us is Zhao Mu. Only when the Zhaos found our secret tunnel that led to outside the city did they realize they have been tricked. Later then received news that the real Ying Zheng has reached Xianyang and King Xiaocheng was so upset he fell sick and also gave Zhao Mu a terrible scolding, refusing to see him for one whole month. Their relationship only improved a little recently but Zhao Mu’s influence is not as before. Instead that Guo Kai must have said something and managed to trick that muddle headed King Xiaocheng into trusting him.”

Xiang Shaolong can’t help but ask, “How is Zhao Ya’s situation?”

Tao Fang knows that he has not forgotten this capricious beauty and said with a sigh, “She fell very ill as well. That Qi Yu still wanted to look for her but she chased him out of her residence and many people saw that!”

Wu Zhuo asked in bewilderment, “The King of Zhao did not blame her at all?”

Tao Fang said with a sigh, “It seems that she had once tried very hard to persuade the King of Zhao not to deal with Shaolong so now the muddle headed ruler is now feeling a little regret over that and she is so seriously ill as well. It could be due to these reasons that Zhao Ya’s standing is not very much affected. Now everyone in Handan is fearful, worried that we will lead the Qin army to attack Zhao. Recently King Xiaocheng has sent envoys to the various states hoping to join forces with them to deal with the Qin’s invasion. What a joyous outcome.”

Teng Yi asked, “What’s the fate of the fake Ying Zheng?”

Tao Fang shook his head and sighed, “Executed by Zhao Mu. He was so furious and he can only take it out on this innocent and pitiful person.”

Although Xiang Shaolong felt a little sad about this, but it’s something that cannot be helped.

Tao Fang suddenly reached out and put his hand on Xiang Shaolong’s shoulder and said quietly, “Let me tell you something but you must not get angry.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and asked, “What’s the matter?”

A strange look passed over Tao Fang’s eyes as he said solemnly, “There’s news of Mei Canniang.”

Xiang Shaolong’s expression changed as he asked, “She’s dead?”

Tao Fang shook his head, “No! She married to another village nearby and even has a son now. Her husband is quite a famous hunter and it seems that he’s quite in love with her.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned for a moment, and felt more relaxed instead. He thought of their parting and maybe at that time Mei Canniang has already made up her mind not to leave that peaceful place. That’s good too! Most importantly she has found someone good.

Jing Jun went to stand next to Tao Fang and whispered, “Did you send my letter to Zhao Zhi?”

Teng Yi was shocked and exclaimed, “Did you reveal in your letter that we will be returning to Handan?”

Teng Yi was startled and replied, “Of course not, how can I not know the severity of this matter.”

Tao Fang took out a letter and pressed it into Jing Jun’s hands and said with a laugh, “It seems that Zhao Zhi is a little interested in you!”

Jing Jun exclaimed with joy, turned 3 somersaults and dashed off in a rush, causing everyone else to laugh at him.

Tao Fang saw that even after hearing the news about Mei Canniang, Xiang Shaolong still remained calm so he was assured and continued, “The man we sent to Daliang has returned with news, it seems that Learned Lady Ji has gone to the state of Chu.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Oh no! She must be going to Handan to look for me.”

At the same time everyone understood his meaning. Naturally Learned Lady Ji cannot go directly to Zhao to look for him so she can only go to Chu first and then travel to Handan via Qi.

In ancient times communications is not very convenient and most likely Ji Yanran is still unaware of what has happened in Handan.

However Xiang Shaolong could not think straight due to his concern and said

with determination, “We’ll go to Handan immediately!”

Tao Fang replied, “We have to at least wait until the day after. The Qins have already selected a person to fight with you for the position of the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutor and the duel is set for the day after in front of his Majesty. Anyone who has some status will be there to watch the duel.”

Wu Zhuo asked, “Who is that person?”

Tao Fang replied, “I think he’s called Wang Jian!”

Xiang Shaolong was greatly stunned and thought how can there be such a coincidence.

Xiang Shaolong sat alone to think next to a tiny waterfall near the farm.

In this Warring States era, there is indeed paradise everywhere, just like the rare scenery right before his eyes. The mountain peaks standing in line, strange and unique rocks, clear water flowing in between, waterfalls and ponds and the moving water reflecting the rays of the sun. One can never grow tired of seeing this scenery.

He sat next to a pond, listening to the musical sounds of the waterfall falling into the clear pond, looking at the lush green bamboo trees next to the bank waving in the wind. The scene is filled with the sense of spring, life and growth and he can’t help but feel energized.

But once his attention turned to the duel the day after, he’s filled with gloom

again.

No matter which one of them wins, he's afraid there'll be a problem.

The problem is whether he can change history.

If the answer is no, he can then not bother himself with anything and retire to the woods happily, enjoying life with his wives and maids everyday and Xiao Pan will naturally become the first Emperor of China.

The frustration is that he cannot be sure.

If he wins Wang Jian, will the other party still become a key official in unifying the 6 states in future?

This is really a test to his brains.

But he cannot lose as well, otherwise the Wu family warriors will be badly affected and it'll also be a great blow to Xiao Pan and even his trip to Handan may be affected as well.

Just as he was feeling troubled, the sweet laughter of young girls can be heard.

Hidden amongst the trees, the 2 pretty maids Cuitong and Cuilu, each carrying 2 small wooden pails, came to fetch water. They were talking and laughing softly and did not notice the presence of Xiang Shaolong.

The 2 girls came to the side of the pond and put down their small pails.

Cuitong sat down on a rock while Cuilu took off her shoes, revealing her pretty naked feet and stepped into the water. She was relaxed and occasionally let out a tinkling laugh.

Xiang Shaolong remembered how he flirted and had fun with Mei Canniang at the lake in the valley and a wave of emotions came over him.

Cuitong suddenly asked, "Has Young Master hugged you before?"

Cuilu giggled and asked her back, "What about you?"

Cuitong blushed and nodded her head. She looked bothered as she said, "Hai! He just lightly put his hand around my waist and kissed my face, that's all."

Cuilu laughed, "Our little lass is in love."

Cuitong said angrily, "You're not much better than me, you were calling out for Young Master last night in your dreams."

Cuilu cried out with embarrassment, "Don't say anymore!"

Looking at the 2 girls, the troubled Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel his heart lurch and stood up from where he was hidden.

The 2 girls suddenly saw that there's a person and turned their heads around.

When they saw it was Xiang Shaolong, they were initially shocked, which quickly turned to embarrassment as they blushed, not knowing where to hide themselves.

Xiang Shaolong was afraid they'll run away out of embarrassment and quickly moved to their sides and grabbed their soft hands.

The 2 girls' bodies went soft immediately as they collapsed onto the ground next to the pond and refused to get up, their heads bowed so low that it seems they're trying to hide them in their bosoms.

Xiang Shaolong's lust was ignited on seeing this and asked with a laugh, "You refuse to move? Then we can just have fun here in this pond."

The 2 girls were greatly shocked and cried out in unison, "No! We'll be seen."

Xiang Shaolong threatened them, "You don't want to be seen? Then come with me obediently!"

The 2 girls stood up helplessly, filled with embarrassment and joy.

Xiang Shaolong pulled the 2 girls along, stepping on the uneven rocks as they walked along the river upstream and after a short while came to a small pond at the highest level. It offered them a bird's eye view of the pretty scenery down the valley.

He told the 2 girls to sit down next to him and with his arms around their shoulders, they admired this fairy-tale like scenery.

The 2 girls can't help but lean towards his embrace, their fragrance intoxicating him.

Is civilization a good thing or a bad thing?

Man is caught in his own trap by the technology 2000 years later by constantly spoiling this beautiful nature. If anyone could have come to his era like he has, they will certainly be filled with regret that nature has changed so much.

Cuitong asked quietly, "Has Young Master been sitting there all this while earlier?"

Xiang Shaolong replied mischievously, "I was sleeping and didn't hear anything about a light hug, kissing faces or someone talking in their dreams last night."

The 2 girls were immediately shamefaced and groaned as they buried their pretty faces in his arms.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly commending that men in this era is really fortunate as his hands caressed their soft cheeks, massaging them gently.

The 2 girls were trembling under his touch as their breathing quickened.

At this point in time, there is no need for words.

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head and as if looking for a treasure, searched for

Cuitong's fragrant lips and he kissed her hard.

Whereas his other hand started his invasion towards Cuilu.

Cuilu has no defense against his expert caresses and teasing so she moaned in protest, "Young Master!"

By now the sun is slowly setting and a white cloud happened to float across and became a bright red fireball hanging in the sky under the reflection of the setting bright sun.

Xiang Shaolong left Cuitong's fragrant lips and this pretty young girl who was aroused gave a soft moan and turned around to hug his strong waist.

He lowered his head towards the blushing Cuilu whom he was caressing. This pretty girl was sneaking peeks at him and on seeing his direct gaze she became totally embarrassed. That captivating look made Xiang Shaolong unable to control himself and he asked with a laugh, "With the grass as our bed and the sky as our blanket, will the 2 elder sisters object?"

The 2 girls were moaning so much that they couldn't speak.

That night Xiang Shaolong thoroughly enjoyed himself but even when he was being captivated, images of Ji Yanran, Mei Canniang and even Zhao Ya flashed through his mind.

The women all knew that he will soon be leaving for Zhao and in their sadness, they tried even harder to make him happy, unable to bear the

parting with him.

Time seems to past especially fast under such situations and they left this pretty little valley 2 days later to return to Xianyang City. With the exception of Jing Jun, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo both stayed behind to continue the training of the elite troops.

They have just reached the Wu residence and Wu Yingyuan has already dragged him aside, saying seriously, “Tu Xian has done a check on that Wang Jian. It seems that not only is this person’s swordsmanship is the best in Qin, he is most formidable in horse riding and archery. He can fire 3 arrows consecutively and he uses an iron bow with copper string. No man or beast within 500 steps can escape.”

He thought of that irritating Lian Jin, whose archery skills may not even be better than this person’s, Xiang Shaolong can’t help but feel his head grow numb as he asked, “How old is this person?”

Obviously Wu Yingyuan is worried for him and said with a sigh, “He should be around 20 this year and it seems that he has quite gentle and scholarly features. No one would be able to guess from his looks that he is so formidable.”

He continued somberly, “Tu Xian found out that Lord Yangquan and Wang He have already decided long ago that he will duel with you but they dragged it for so many days so that he can make use of this time to practice harder. These people are up to no good and knows that you have been separated from your wives for so long, you’ll certainly expend a lot of energy between

the sheets. To think that they can even think of that. Even Premier Lu is very worried now!”

Xiang Shaolong remembered his amorous night and felt guilty and at the same time thought that he is indeed belittling his enemy.

Wu Yingyuan tapped his shoulder and said, “Try to conserve your energy as much as possible. I will explain to Fang’er.”

Xiang Shaolong returned to Hidden Dragon Abode and hid himself in the Solitude Room to meditate according to the Mohist instructions and in no time he was deep in meditation, forgetting about everything else.

“Kok! Kok!”

The sound of the door being knocked woke Xiang Shaolong up abruptly.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly opened the door only to see Wu Tingfang’s looking distressed and stammering, “Xiao Jun has been beaten up and he’s quite seriously injured!”

Xiang Shaolong was shocked and hurriedly made his way to the main building. Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang were all there as well as the 2 Wu family’s resident physicians who were helping to stop the bleeding and bandaging Jing Jun.

Xiang Shaolong squeezed his way to Jing Jun and after instructing everyone else to stand back, he began to inspect his injury.

He has at least 7 to 8 stab wounds and the most serious was the one on his left chest, which almost pierced his heart. The other injuries may look scary but they're all superficial wounds. However, 2 of the stab wounds were so deep that his bones can be seen and his flesh and skin is opened wide, looking extremely frightening.

Jing Jun lost too much blood and is now in a semi-conscious state, his face contorting in severe pain occasionally.

Although Xiang Shaolong was upset, he knows that he should be able to survive this. He retreated to stand between Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang and asked, "Who did this!"

Wu Yingyuan replied, "We've already informed Tu Xian, they will send someone to investigate. Luckily this lad has a strong constitution. He's so seriously injured yet he only collapsed after he dragged himself back. He's really formidable."

Tao Fang said, "These people are obviously after his life."

The guard was heard calling out, "Premier Lu arrives!"

Everyone did not expect Lu Buwei to visit personally and they turned around in surprise to welcome him.

Lu Buwei walked in under the escort of a dozen odd bodyguards and after taking a close look at Jing Jun's injuries, he walked to one corner to speak with the 3 of them. He said seriously, "This must be the ploy of Lord

Yangquan and his men. They want to kill Xiao Jun so as to affect Shaolong's mind. Shaolong you must not be tricked."

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, "Obviously they've underestimated Xiao Jun's ability to escape. As soon as Xiao Jun wakes up, we will know who did this."

Lu Buwei replied, "No matter who did this, we will settle everything with our enemy after the duel with Wang Jian tomorrow. As long as Shaolong gets the title of Grand Tutor, I will give Shaolong all my support to help Xiao Jun claim this blood debt and let everyone know that Lu Buwei is not someone to be bullied."

Xiang Shaolong is in a dilemma. He does not want to be on such close terms with Lu Buwei but it seems that if the situation were to continue developing like this, he will become Lu Buwei's party sooner or later.

This is not the problem. He's most afraid that once everyone develop feelings for one another, it'll be a headache in future.

Jing Jun groaned and regained consciousness.

Everyone rushed forward.

Jing Jun only saw Xiang Shaolong and he exclaimed angrily, "Big Brother! They were so vicious!"

Xiang Shaolong reached out to press his shoulder down, "Don't move!"

Lu Buwei asked quietly, “Who did this!”

Jing Jun calmed down a little and gritted his teeth in pain, saying, “There were 20 odd people, I only recognize one of them as ‘Scarface’ Guoxing.”

After Lu Buwei gave instructions for him to be carried to the room to tend to his injuries, his eyes gleamed murderously as he said, “This Guoxing is quite famous in Xianyang and is one of the 3 main tutors in Weinan Martial Arts School. The principal Qiu Risheng is quite close with the military and has never given any respect to my men. Shaolong, help me kick that school down at a later date. I want the Qins to know that they won’t have a good life if they offend me. How many people will you need? Just say it out.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed and thought that he wants them to be his fighter and replied, “This is just a small matter, we have enough resources to deal with this.”

Lu Buwei exclaimed happily, “With Shaolong around, our entire situation is changed. If Lord Yangquan and his men were not afraid of Shaolong, they would not have resorted to such tricks.”

He paused and continued, “I will come and meet up with you first tomorrow before we enter the Palace together. I am confident that Shaolong will not disappoint.”

Xiang Shaolong had a thought and he made some eye signals with Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang first before saying, “Let Shaolong send Premier Lu out!”

Wu and Tao understood his meaning and let him send Lu Buwei to his waiting carriage outside alone.

Lu Buwei is an extremely astute man and he asked quietly, “Is there something Shaolong wants to say?”

Xiang Shaolong just smiled without talking, until they came to the carriage before he said, “Not a moment during the last 10 days have Shaolong not been thinking hard for Premier Lu and I think that it’s not a very good idea to continuously oppose the local Qin power. Maybe in the end both sides will be seriously wounded.”

Lu Buwei sighed, “Congeniality should be the key to everything. I’ve thought of this as well but the Qins have always been suspicious of outsiders and no one will believe that I’m sincerely giving my best for the state of Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, “Since they joined forces because of mutual benefits, then we will split them up by luring them. For the hardcore people like Lord Yangquan or Weinan Martial Arts School, we will destroy them heartlessly and make use of the opportunity to stand our ground. But for people like Wang He who are not doing this for personal gains entirely, we can try to bribe him into joining our side.”

A strange light came over Lu Buwei’s eyes and after eyeing Xiang Shaolong intently, he nodded his head and said, “Shaolong seems to have a plan, say it out quickly!”

Xiang Shaolong gave a short summary of his plan.

After hearing it, Lu Buwei said, “Naturally it’ll be good if this can be done but I’m just afraid that if we’re not careful, things can become worse and lives will be sacrificed in vain.”

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, “The Wu family is hugely indebted to Premier Lu, so what’s the big deal even if I have to take some risk?”

Lu Buwei chortled and grasped Xiang Shaolong’s shoulders tightly before leaving.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has gained Lu Buwei’s trust and he turned back to look for Jing Jun.

Chapter 4

The Imperial Duel

Thousands of people gathered at the huge square next to the hall in Xianyang Palace. It was like a marketplace, with everyone waiting impatiently to see the grand duel that's about to be held.

On one side there were the Qin's most famously invincible and fierce warrior.

On the other side is a rising star with great military merits, a swordsman from Zhao.

Everyone wants to witness how these 2 are going to fight to win.

The sun was shining brightly and 3 tall platforms were erected near the main hall with seats neatly arranged on them. The middle platform is naturally the seats for King Zhuangxiang, the Crown Prince and the Empress.

The platform on the left was filled with major officials and military generals who were on Lord Yangquan and Wang He's side.

On the platform on the right, besides Lu Buwei, Meng Ao and the major officials closer to Lu Buwei are already seated. Li Si is one of them. Actually he is not qualified to have a place there at all but because of his concern for Xiang Shaolong, he managed to talk and persuade his way into getting a seat.

Others who were of a lower status can only stand at the circumference of the square to view the duel.

With the mail armors and helmet gleaming, the Qin soldiers who were taller and bigger built than people from the other 6 states, stood guard on the long stairway leading to the main hall and around the 3 viewing platforms. Their long halberds shone under the sun, giving the soldiers a dignified and serious air.

At this time Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong has just arrived in their carriage and they walked towards the right after they alighted. Immediately there was a commotion as people pointed and shouted at Xiang Shaolong.

Lu Buwei exhaled and whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ears, "The Qins love a good fight and hold heroes in high regard. You can only win and not lose in this duel."

Xiang Shaolong has already meditated according to the instructions on the Mohist scroll this morning and at this moment he's feeling very energetic so he said with confidence, "Premier Lu, do not worry!"

Lu Buwei commented, "That person dressed in black warrior outfit on the left platform is Qiu Risheng, don't forget his face." His tone revealed a deep hatred.

Xiang Shaolong looked over that direction only to see the eyes of almost a hundred people on the platform were all focused on him and hurriedly smiled and nodded in response. He took a glance at that Qiu Risheng and

then looked away.

Lu Buwei led him up the platform and sat down after introducing him to the other people. He asked Tu Xian who was at the back, "Is Wang Jian here yet?"

Tu Xian replied, "Should be here! But I wonder where he is?"

The sound of the horn was heard.

Under the escort of the imperial guards, King Zhuangxiang who was dressed in his dragon robes, leading Xiao Pan, Zhu Ji, Lady Xiuli and Prince Qi Chongqiao as well as a bevy of concubines, walked out from inside the hall towards the platform in the middle.

All the soldiers stood at attention while the rest of the people both on and off the platform knelt down to welcome them. For a moment the atmosphere in the whole square was solemn and silent.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly complimenting, on seeing this situation he can see the nobility of the King of Qin and how much importance the Qins place on compliance and discipline.

It's only after King Zhuangxiang and the Princes and Concubines were seated and the attendant declared everyone to rise and be seated did the atmosphere returned to what it was previously. However, everyone stopped talking and quietly waited for King Zhuangxiang's announcement.

The attendant cried out, "Where is Xiang Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly rose and at the same time removed his outer robe to reveal his perfect physique. He left the platform to come to the front of the main platform and bowed his acquiesce to the King.

King Zhuangxiang looked at Xiang Shaolong happily and kept on nodded his head to show his approval.

He has lived abroad for many years and basically he can be considered an outsider, therefore he feels a special affinity to this young swordsman from Zhao who rescued his wife as well.

The attendant cried out again, "Where is Wang Jian?"

He has just finished his sentence when the sounds of hooves were heard only to see a steed running in from the palace gates like a gust of wind.

The crowd cheered thunderously as they all gave way to let the steed past unobstructed.

When it comes to flaunting, Xiang Shaolong has obviously lost greatly.

Wang Jian's horsemanship is astounding. In such a short distance, he has already executed several difficult poses and just as he is about to stop, he miraculously curled under the horse's belly and mounted onto the horse's back on the other side before leaping off the horse to kneel at the ground as he cried out loudly, "Your soldier Wang Jian! Paying his respects to your

Majesty!”

Once again everyone cheered deafeningly, pushing the whole atmosphere into a high.

Lu Buwei and the rest of the people on the platform, including Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang who were full of confidence for Xiang Shaolong, started feeling a little shaken after seeing his astounding horsemanship. The confidence of Lu Buwei and the others who have not truly seen the ability of Xiang Shaolong were even more affected.

King Zhuangxiang revealed a look of surprise and kept nodding his head.

Because Zhu Ji has a special liking for Xiang Shaolong, she grabbed Xiao Pan’s hand anxiously only to realize Xiao Pan’s palm is sweating as well.

Everyone on Lord Yangquan’s platform looked ecstatic instead as if Xiang Shaolong’s defeat is a sure thing. Wang Jian stood up and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

At the same time Xiang Shaolong looked across with a smile and they saw each other directly.

Both of them revealed a look of surprise at the same time, both shocked at the other’s physique and charm.

This Wang Jian is indeed as Wu Yingyuan described, fair and delicate looking but it’s not enough to really describe him.

He's only about half an inch shorter than Xiang Shaolong and he wore a red and black warrior's outfit with an armor vest. His arms and shoulders were wide and his build robust, giving out a heroic air.

His nose is high with deep set eyes which looked unfathomable, his jet black hair combed into a small bun at the top and secured tightly with a red rope with its 2 ends dropping down to the back of his neck which made him appear even more powerful.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly admiring him and smiled in return, thinking that with such a capabilities, no wonder he could help Xiao Pan conquer the world and unite the 6 states in future.

Wang Jian saw that Xiang Shaolong looked friendly and his countenance relaxed as well and politely returned the greeting but his eyes was still filled with enmity.

At this point in time the attendant from the main platform read out the purpose of the duel this time and naturally at the same time offered encouragement to the contestants and emphasized the importance of maintaining good sportsmanship.

Towards the end, the attendant announced loudly, "The duel today will be split into 2 parts, with horse riding and archery first followed by swordplay."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting and thought that although he has improved greatly on his riding skills recently, but if he were to compare with Wang Jian, he won't be able to catch up even if he goes back and train for a

few more years.

Wang Jian accepted the orders loudly so Xiang Shaolong can only follow him and agree as well.

With a 'whoosh!', Wang Jian leapt up the horse in a graceful motion and rode off. When it looks as if he's almost knocking into the spectators standing at the corner of the square, he pulled his horse back with a stand and the horse turned around gracefully and came to a sudden stop.

Naturally another round of applause and cheers sounded.

2 soldiers took out a target board from the side of the square and placed it right in the middle of the broad square.

At this time Lu Buwei ordered his man to lead Jifeng out. Xiang Shaolong smiled calmly and jumped up the horse's back from its rump and clasped his legs around the horse's belly. Jifeng galloped around the square with astonishing speed and came to another corner of the square and they also received many cheers.

Wang Jian took out his steel bow from the side of his saddle and held it high above his head, which immediately caused another uproar of admiration.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is very confident and was prepared to display his archery skill. He recollected his feelings and shouted to Wang Jian from afar, "How can a still target be compared to a live target, why don't Brother Wang shoot 3 arrows at me? I guarantee that I won't use my shield to block."

Silence immediately spread through the square but everyone has an incredulous look in their eyes, as if thinking whether this person is seeking death?

But Xiang Shaolong is the only one who can understand the difficult position he is in. Instead of waiting to be defeated, he might as well take the risk and make use of his own swordsmanship and agility to deal with the other party's arrows. If he succeed, then he'll be able to pass this stage.

Wang Jian is not one who likes to take advantage of others and he shouted back, "Arrows have no feelings, has Brother Xiang thought clearly about this."

Xiang Shaolong bowed to King Zhuangxiang from afar and cried out, "Would your Majesty please approve!"

King Zhuangxiang hesitated for a moment before signaling with his hand his approval.

The almost 2000 odd people at the square held their breath, waiting for that heart stopping scene to appear.

Wang Jian lifted his bow with one hand while he pulled out 4 long arrows from his back with his other hand, holding them between his 5 fingers, his stance showing his familiarity and making others feel that it's as easy as breathing for him to shoot these 4 arrows.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting in his heart. It turns out that this person is so unfathomable, making others think that he can only shoot 3

arrows at once but only now did he reveal his true ability.

Silence.

Wang Jian laughed loudly, “My steel bow and arrows can pierce through any shield, so it doesn’t matter even if Brother Xiang uses a shield. Be careful!” He clasped his horse’s belly lightly and his warhorse sped forward.

Xiang Shaolong looked heavenward and laughed as he clapped his horse and dashed forward but towards the direction of King Zhuangxiang’s side, trying to intimidate him as he will not dare to release the arrows towards King Zhuangxiang’s direction and to put him down a little.

The 2 steeds got closer then further away, their positions exchanged.

Wang Jian pulled his horse’s head back and immediately turned back.

Xiang Shaolong’s mind went into the Mohist’s technique of calmness. Heaven and earth seems to have gone totally quiet in this instant and there’s nothing else besides Wang Jian.

At the same time he hurried his horse towards Wang Jian.

As long as he can stick close to Wang Jian and avoid the 4 arrows, he can consider this horse riding and archery contest a closed deal.

The 2 steeds got closer and closer, from over 1000 steps away to about less than 700 hundred steps away.

‘Twang!’

Wang Jian pulled his bowstring and without knowing how, one of the arrows have landed outside the bowstring.

Instantly the arrow flew out.

Xiang Shaolong has never seen such swift arrow, as if they have just left the bowstring and in the next instant they’re at his face.

Luckily his reflexes are 10 times more agile than the average person and with a shout, he drew Bloodwave from his back and hacked diagonally at the arrowheads.

The crowd, regardless of friend or foe, all cheered.

Xiang Shaolong reined in his horse, pulled out his sword and blocked, the few movements all done in one fluid motion like flowing water, the angle and timing executed appropriately and exhibiting an extremely splendid pose of movement and strength. Everyone who saw this were moved and cheered for him.

From this one can see that the Qins are straightforward and sincere people.

With a crisp ‘dang!’, the steel arrow landed on the ground.

Wang Jian cried out loudly, ‘Good’ and in an instant he was missing and it turned out that he has flipped under the horse’s belly.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly stunned. His opponent's arrows earlier were filled with power and the impact cause his whole right arm to become numb and he almost dropped his precious sword Bloodwave. And now he can't even see Wang Jian at all, which means that he did not even know how he fired the arrow, so how can he not be shocked.

The square is now so quiet one can hear a pin drop, and it seems as if everyone stopped breathing as well.

What are left are only the thundering hoof beats of the warhorses.

Both parties drew nearer, from 700 steps away to 500 steps away.

Without hearing the bow twang at all, Xiang Shaolong saw from his angle 2 arrows shooting out at the same time from beneath the horse's belly from the right at an angle, one aimed at his heart while the other speeding towards his thigh, calculated with absolute certainty the precise point when Xiang Shaolong falls, his expertise making others pause in awe.

Xiang Shaolong knows that they are now 200 steps closer to each other and his arm has still not recovered from the numbness yet so there's no way he can use his arm strength to counter his opponent's powerful arrows so he made a risky decision and forcefully used the hilt of the sword to hit down on the incoming arrow and at the same time with his innate reflexes, his leg kicked out like lightning towards the other arrow.

Before the crowd can worry for him, he has already knocked the arrow off target with is sword hilt forcefully while he felt a sharp pain near the tip of

his shoes as he kicked the other arrow. Because of the impact, the arrow flew off tangent and flew diagonally up past the front of Xiang Shaolong's body to the highest point in the air before falling down.

By now the 2 steeds are only 300 steps away from each other.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt that something was amiss. It turned out that the last arrow has flown out quietly from the side of the horse's neck at a very difficult angle and unless he can flip down to the horse's belly, there's no way he can avoid the arrow. But by now it's too late.

Xiang Shaolong's arm is aching so much by now that he can't even lift or put it down and it's pure luck that he can still hold on to Bloodwave. He roared and his left hand drew out the wooden sword on the side of the horse and attempted to sweep his opponent's last arrow away.

"Puff!"

The steel arrow was swept aside.

The crowd cheered thunderously. Even Wang Jian can't help but cried out, 'Excellent' as he hung his bow back on his horse's back and pulled out his sword to charge towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong dare not let down his guard. He put Bloodwave back across his back and waving the wooden sword with his left hand, urged his horse forward.

The two of them brushed past each other and the continuous ringing of wood against metal rang throughout the square.

Xiang Shaolong could feel that his opponent's arm strength is the same, if not better, than his own and was secretly startled. He deliberately rode to the edge of the square before turning his horse back so that he can gain more time for his right arm to recover.

All the spectators felt as if their hearts are now in their throats.

Wang Jian raised his long sword high up and sped forward in his horse.

Xiang Shaolong transferred the wooden sword to his right hand, took a deep breath and rode towards this strong opponent.

The 2 steeds came closer and closer at lightning speed and when they're 50 steps away, Xiang Shaolong suddenly increased his speed as he sat on the handsome steed which his bosom confidante Ji Yanran gave him like an arrow on full speed, looking as if he was riding on a cloud and speeding towards Wang Jian's horse.

Xiang Shaolong executed one of the 3 killer moves of using defense to attack in the Mohist swordplay, 'Whirlwind Style'. The wooden sword sprang up halfway into the air and turned one round, extremely forceful as it swept across.

Because of his opponent's horse sudden surge, Wang Jiang's estimation was thrown awry. His plan to use his horsemanship to win came to naught,

followed by he was confused by his opponent's strange moves. Only when the danger is almost in his face did he manage to barely block it with his sword.

Xiang Shaolong came up with such a strange plan precisely because he was wary of his horsemanship. If he can figure out Jifeng's speed and his own sword style, he'll definitely lose if it's going to be a long drawn battle. To Wang Jian, he is even more agile on the horse than off.

There was a loud 'Clang!', and Wang Jian almost fell off his horse together with his sword from the upper hand slash because Xiang Shaolong's attack made use of the force of nature's gravity to increase the strength of his attack. The wooden sword is very heavy in itself, that's why he was able to achieve such an accidental upper hand.

Wang Jian leaned low on his horse's back to defend against Xiang Shaolong's attack.

Xiang Shaolong's wooden sword was a whirl of movement on his top right and at the same time when the 2 horses burshed against each other, he took the opportunity to use his feet to point at 2 spots on Wang Jian's thigh. However the spectators were all focused on his wooden sword and the horses' bodies blocked most of the view from the spectators, therefore only the two of them knew in their hearts what happened and not a third person was aware.

Naturally Wang Jian knew that he was being lenient.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the time is now ripe and he waved their prearranged signal with his wooden sword towards Lu Buwei who was on the platform.

By now the 2 steed have exchanged places and looking at each other from afar.

Wang Jian looked totally dejected. He is a valiant hero, so a loss is a loss and he will not attempt to deny it. Just as he was about to abandon his sword and admit defeat, Lu Buwei stood up forcefully and cried out, "Stop!"

Everyone looked at him in astonishment.

Lu Buwei walked to the side of the stage and knelt towards King Zhuangxiang and said, "Regardless of swordsmanship or horse riding and archery, both Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian are on par with each other. Your subordinate would not wish to see any of them injured. I beseech your Majesty to declare that there's no winner or loser in this duel and both of them will have the honor of bring the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor and bear the heavy responsibility of guiding the Crown Prince."

Half of those people seated on Lord Yangquan's side looked flabbergasted as they did not expect Lu Buwei to be so magnanimous. Although they did not see the 2 light kicks Xiang Shaolong gave to Wang Jian earlier, everyone saw how Wang Jian almost fell off the horse due to the impact of Xiang Shaolong's sword and knew that he has lost his advantage.

King Zhuangxiang nodded his head slightly and asked Xiang Shaolong, "What

does my beloved subject Xiang think of this, are you willing put a halt to this!”

By saying that, naturally it’s because he could tell that Xiang Shaolong has a higher chance of winning.

Anyone with some sense, on seeing Wang Jian’s expression, will not feel optimistic for him.

Xiang Shaolong returned his sword to his sheath and replied respectfully, “General Wang’s horse riding and archery skills are astounding and his swordsmanship extraordinary and I am very impressed. Premier Lu’s suggestion is like the fresh water after a long drought and I am most willing to accept it.”

King Zhuangxiang chortled and stood up as he announced, “From today onwards, both Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian will both be the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutors and will both serve the prince as equals.”

Cheers erupted thunderously.

The most grateful person is Wang Jian. The post of the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutor is too important to him, otherwise there’s no way he can use his abilities even though he is full of aspirations.

But the happiest person is Lu Buwei. This idea that Xiang Shaolong taught his is most beautiful indeed, winning him the cheers of almost everyone present and this sweet feeling is something he has never experienced before in Qin.

Zhu Ji is so excited that she clutched Xiao Pan's hand tightly and whispered in his ear, "Fresh water after a long drought, is there anyone in this world other than your Tutor who can speak so beautifully in this world?"

Xiao Pan's eyes gleamed as he looked at his only family and kept nodding his head.

Amidst the continuous cheers, Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian both rode towards the main platform and dismounted to express their gratitude.

Just as everyone was sending King Zhuangxiang off, Wang Jian said quietly, "Thank you!"

Xiang Shaolong replied in a low voice as well, "This is our secret, Brother Wang can just invite me for a drink!"

Wang Jiang was just getting worried that he will boast about this matter and now he is so grateful that he immediately agreed.

By now all the royalty and officials have clamored down the platforms to hurry and offer their congratulations to the both of them.

Xiang Shaolong took this opportunity to move to Wang He and thanked him sincerely for giving him this opportunity and this made Wang He immediately feel proud, as if he was really the one who helped Xiang Shaolong get a leg up.

Lu Buwei and him are already in agreement over this so naturally he won't

blame him for being so nice to Wang He. Instead he turned to offer his congratulations to Wang Jian in order to gain his trust.

On seeing such a splendid ending, Kiang Zhuangxiang beamed as well.

Besides Lord Yangquan and a few of his hardcore followers who looked somber because they've failed to defeat Xiang Shaolong, everyone else was in a cheery and festive mood because they've witnessed such a magnificent duel.

They managed to pass a thunderstorm safely.

Chapter 5

Making a strange encounter

After the duel, King Zhuangxiang summoned Xiang Shaolong and Wang Jian into the Palace to offer his encouragement. He also praised Lu Buwei in public, impressed with his wonderful suggestion.

That night Lu Buwei held a private feast at his residence and the only people invited were Xiang Shaolong, Wu Yingyuan and Meng Ao. On his side, besides Lu Buwei himself, there was only his trusted aide Tu Xian and a few respected houseguests. Li Si is still not qualified enough to be part of such high class and intimate gatherings.

During the feast Lu Buwei was in high spirits and kept encouraging Xiang Shaolong to drink more.

Meng Ao witnessed Xiang Shaolong's extraordinary swordsmanship and how he faced death heroically and was thoroughly impressed and changed his opinion of him.

Wu Yingyuan was even more ecstatic on seeing how his beloved son-in-law has made such a great contribution.

Wine was passed for several rounds as the singers and dancers have ended their entertainment.

Lu Buwei chortled and told Xiang Shaolong who was sitting opposite him, “Recently the Qis have sent me 3 song courtesans who are all rare beauties and well versed in music, chess and dance. A beauty is a match with a hero, I will in turn offer them as gifts to Shaolong, Mister Wu and General Meng, please do not decline.”

Wu Yingyuan and Meng Ao were secretly thinking that the beauties Lu Buwei is giving out must be good and expressed their thanks happily.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that he already cannot handle his beautiful wives and pretty maids at home and he’s also not used to the thinking of the people during the warring states period where they regard women as tools or decorations so he hurriedly rejected, “Shaolong is appreciative of Premier’s kind intentions but the journey to Handan is like an arrow already pulled on the bow and must be fired. Shaolong does not wish to be distracted by beauties for now and I hope Premier will forgive me.”

Lu Buwei saw that he is not greedy for beauties at all and a sense of respect welled up in his heart. On top of that he was not conceited about his feat, so Lu Buwei said with a smile, “Then I will ask Mister Wu to keep her for you and Shaolong can enjoy yourself after you’ve captured Zhao Mu.”

There was uproar as everyone made fun of Wu Yingyuan, saying that he might not be able to hold himself back and use the beauty for himself instead and the atmosphere became festive.

Xiang Shaolong saw that there’s no way he could object so he can only accept the gift with a wry smile.

Meng Ao asked, “When does Shaolong plan to leave for Zhao.”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Ji Yanran and wish that he could set off immediately. He took a glance at Lu Buwei’s houseguests and hesitated.

Lu Buwei knew what he was concerned about and said with a smile, “It’s all our own people in here, Shaolong can just speak your mind.”

Xiang Shaolong said in a low voice, “We’ll set off immediately as soon as Xiao Jun recovers.”

Lu Buwei nodded his head and said, “I will bring this matter up to his Majesty and when the time comes we’ll just find an excuse, maybe say that we want you to go somewhere on a mission, then Shaolong will be able to secretly go towards the Zhao border without anyone noticing.”

Right now he has full confidence in Xiang Shaolong and although he does not know how Xiang Shaolong intends to capture Zhao Mu alive, he truly believes that he will succeed.

Lu Buwei changed the subject and said, “Xiao Jun must be avenged, how does Shaolong plan to deal with that Qiu Risheng and Guo Xing?”

Wu Yingyuan seems a little worried about this as he asked, “If this matter gets out of hand, will his Majesty be displeased?”

Lu Buwei replied with a laugh, “Don’t worry! I have brought this matter up to his Majesty earlier and he is also very unhappy with Qiu Risheng’s despicable

methods so Shaolong can go ahead and do whatever you want. I will bear responsibility if anything happens.”

Xiang Shaolong was extremely furious that Jing Jun was almost killed and his gaze turned icy as he said coldly, “Shaolong knows what to do now.” After staying in this era for such a long time, he is long familiar that a lot of matters have to be settled through brute force, otherwise sooner or later he will be the one who will be in danger. If not for the fact that Jing Jun managed to escape this time, otherwise they won’t even know who has killed him. So he can’t be too bothered by allowing himself to become Lu Buwei’s fighter for once.

If he does not teach the other party a hard lesson, the same thing can happen to Tao Fang or Wu Yingyuan and by then it’ll be too late for regrets.

The feast continued amidst such festive atmosphere until both the hosts and guests have drunk their fill before they all went home.

On the way back Wu Yingyuan was feeling tipsy as he said with a sigh, “To have such a fine son-in-law like Shaolong, not only is it Tingfang’s good fortune but also the Wu family’s good luck. If not for Shaolong, how can we possibly have such lavish lives in Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong has developed deep feelings of his astute father-in-law. Almost right from the start, Wu Yingyuan has supported this son-in-law of his without asking for anything in return and even married his beloved daughter to him, so how can he not feel grateful.

Hot tears flowed out of Wu Yingyuan as he continued, “Once Shaolong captures Zhao Mu, you must most importantly ask his Majesty to build a grand cenotaph in Xianyang for Father. Once I think how he has gone with no remains left behind, I... hai!”

Xiang Shaolong was worried that his health will be affected after all the drinks so he hurriedly consoled him.

He felt a mix of emotions, it seems that he should build cenotaphs for Zhao Ni, Shu’er and Su Nu as well so that at least there’s something to pay his respects to.

Naturally that night at Hidden Dragon Abode, he was engaged in loving copulation with the ladies.

The next morning, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo had rushed back after hearing news of Jing Jun’s injury and they even took with them 15 highly skilled swordsmen from the elite troops.

Jing Jun was in better spirits now and can sit up and talk.

After taking a look at his injuries, Teng Yi nodded his head and said, “They are out for Xiao Hun’s life indeed.”

Jing Jun said worriedly, “You must include me on your trip to Handan.”

Wu Zhuo replied, “Then you’d better have a good sleep!” He made eye contact with the other two before leaving the room.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi followed him out into the hall. Wu Zhuo said, "The only way is to repay violence with violence, otherwise the same thing will happen again sooner or later."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "And we must do it openly, try our best to amplify the matter and let everyone know that us Wu family is not one to be bullied."

Teng Yi said, "No more delays then, I have not exercised my muscles for a long time."

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "Then why don't we set off immediately. After teaching those idiots a lesson, we'll still have enough time to enjoy a sumptuous lunch."

The 3 of them stood up and leading those 15 excellent fighters, rode out of the Wu residence towards the Martial Arts School.

Along the way, the streets were filled with people, carriages and horses, making it extremely lively.

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong is riding through Xianyang on a horse and everything seemed interesting. Along the way he chatted and pointed at interesting things with the rest of the group, feeling very happy.

Teng Yi suddenly reined his horse to a stop and looked towards the direction of sounds where there was some commotion, only to see chaos on the pavement. There was a 'bang!' as a fruits and vegetables stall set up outside

a provisions shop was knocked to the ground and everyone jumped out of the way.

Suddenly a woman with a long scarf covering her head and face scurried out of the crowd and dashed towards another passageway with five to six huge and ferocious looking men running after her.

Right at this time a mule cart rode over and that woman whose features cannot be seen clearly screamed in alarm. Just as she was about to be knocked down by the cart, she fortunately managed to step back in time but she tripped on something, lost her balance and fell.

The scarf covering her head fell and her long silky hair fell, touching the ground.

The few brutish men caught up with her and surrounded the woman.

The woman raised her pretty face and screamed, "Kill me! I will never go back."

Xiang Shaolong and everyone else's eyes brightened, they did not expect this woman to be so young and beautiful.

Teng Yi shouted as he jumped off his horse.

One of the men sniggered, "You dare to interfere in our matters, are you tired of living!"

Teng Yi stepped in between 2 of the men in one large stride.

The 2 men roared in anger as they raised their fists to punch.

Teng Yi lowered himself slightly as his iron fists extended out from his left and right. The 2 burly men immediately were thrown off upon impact with his fists, unable to get up again.

The other 4 men all pulled out their weapons.

Wu Zhuo gave a secret signal and the 15 warriors all leapt down their horses and stood in formation.

Teng Yi ignored those people and came to the young lady's side, extending his hand as he said, "Miss, get up!"

The young lady looked up at Teng Yi deeply, her pretty face filled with anguish as she shook her head and said, "You cannot win them, leave! Otherwise all of you will be implicated."

Xiang Shaolong who was still on his horse was secretly stunned. His men are all strong and one look others will know they are not easily bullied, then why does this pretty girl have no confidence in them at all? Where could the other party be from?

Teng Yi was touched that she can be so considerate of others even under such circumstances and he said with a smile, "I, Teng Yi, have never feared anyone. At the most I will lose my life!"

The young lady placed her hand in his huge palm and her delicate body trembled as Teng Yi pulled her up.

The burly men helped up the 2 men who fell on the ground as they eyed them hostilely. One of them suddenly saw Xiang Shaolong who was behind seated on a tall horse and exclaimed hoarsely, "Isn't that Grand Tutor Xiang?"

Xiang Shaolong secretly commented to himself that he has not become such a prominent figure. His eyes swept across the crowd as he nudged his horse forward. The burly men's attitude suddenly became very respectful as he asked, "What is this all about?"

The leader of the men said, "Your lowly one is called Zhang Lang, from Premier Lu's residence. I was under Premier's orders to send 2 Qi ladies to your residence but this lady slipped away along the way."

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo exchanged a look and chortled, "So it's just a misunderstanding. All right! Just take it that you have handed this Qi lady to me, all of you may return to report your mission accomplished."

The man said, "There's one more, in the horse carriage behind..."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling hilarious as he said, "Then I'll have to trouble you brothers to send her to my house."

The men saw how polite he was and developed a liking to him as they bowed and left.

Xiang Shaolong moved his horse next to Teng Yi and that Qi lady and on seeing that beauty leaning on Teng Yi helplessly, he had an idea and said, “Shall we find a restaurant nearby to sit down and talk?”

Xiang Shaolong and his men split up into 4 tables and they ordered food and wine.

Naturally the Qi lady sat with Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo. After drinking a cup of hot tea, color started returning to her previously pale face and she looked even prettier. No wonder Lu Buwei praised their beauty.

Teng Yi remained silent but there was a strange expression in his eyes.

Xiang Shaolong asked gently, “How can I address Miss?”

The Qi lady took a peep at Teng Yi and seeing that he was looking straight ahead, felt a little disappointment as she lowered her head and answered quietly, “My name is Shanlan!”

Wu Zhuo asked, “Why do you still want to run away when you’ve already reached Xianyang? Martial law is very strict here, with 10 families forming a group and if any one family breaks the law, the other families will be punished as well and those who hide the truth and not make any reports will be executed. Who would dare to hide you?”

Shanlan’s eyes reddened, “I am prepared to die, so I don’t care that much.”

Teng Yi’s muscular body trembled as he lowered his head and stared at the

steam rising up from his cup of hot tea.

Xiang Shaolong asked gently, "Now that Miss Shan knows that you are supposed to come to our residence, do you still want to run away?"

Shanlan was stunned for a moment before lowering her voice in reply, "I don't know!"

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "Why not this! I will give you 2 choices, either we will send you back to Qi to be reunited with your family, or you will marry my brother Teng Yi." And he tapped Teng Yi's shoulder.

Teng Yi's body shook as he looked at Xiang Shaolong, his expression both embarrassed but there is unhidden gratitude as well.

Love always comes so unexpectedly.

Shanlan's sad situation and her pretty yet piteous face have greatly moved this strong man's already dead heart.

Xiang Shaolong is adept at interpreting others expression so how can he not be aware of Teng Yi's mind.

Shanlan stole another look at Teng Yi and her eyes reddened, and whispered her reply so softly, "I no longer have a home to return to."

Wu Zhuo slapped the table happily, "Then I shall have to congratulate Brother Teng."

Teng Yi furrowed his brows, “Shaolong! She’s supposed to be...”

Xiang Shaolong interrupted him, “If you say this then you’re not taking me as your Brother. Hai! I’m so happy I almost feel like crying now that Brother Teng has once again accepted a happy life!”

Wu Zhuo said with a laugh, “Guess today is not too suitable to seek trouble with Qiu Risheng!”

Xiang Shaolong replied happily, “We’ll go back first and talk!”

He can’t help but heave a sigh of relief. He has settled the problem of the Qi lady and Teng Yi with a happy ending, what else can be more ideal than this?

Chapter 6

The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu

They have just arrived at the Wu residence when Tao Fang came up to them and said, “I was about to send someone to look for you, and luckily all of you came back.”

Xiang Shaolong was startled, “What can be so important?”

Tao Fang replied with a smile, “It is important matter indeed, but it’s something good. His Majesty has ordered you to enter the Palace immediately to see him.” He then pulled him aside and added with a low voice, “Shaolong, don’t blame me for being an old nag, but at the duel yesterday, the way the Empress looked at you was very strange, you must be careful!”

Xiang Shaolong knew the meaning behind his words and said reassuring, “I know what to do. Even if it will not implicate anyone, I would still not do such a dishonorable and foolish act.”

Tao Fang knows that he is a man of his word and is relieved.

Xiang Shaolong turned his horse around and after rejecting the offer from Wu Zhuo and the rest for escorts, he rode towards the Qin Palace.

The width of the streets of Xianyang is between those of Handan and

Daliang, but only in comparison with the few larger streets in the capital of Zhao and Wei. On average, the streets of Xianyang are a lot wider.

He has just turned into the street leading south when Xiang Shaolong had a feeling he was being watched.

It's a feeling that's very difficult to put into words.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled.

Maybe it's because he has meditated so frequently that his senses have become so sharpened. He's also feeling perplexed why would anyone spy on him.

The place is linked to the market at the south side with shops and residences mixed together. On both sides of the road a huge tree is planted at a space of about every 2 feet and the trees grew in lush abundance so it'll be easy for the secret attackers to hide themselves.

He swept the area with his eyes and noticed a few suspicious characters.

Two men were seated at a table next to the window at the 2nd floor of a restaurant and when they saw Xiang Shaolong looking up, they immediately lowered their eyes and pretended to chat.

Another person is a hawker with a stall selling assorted goods at the side of the road, surrounded by a group of people who seem to be buying something. They were haggling about the price but Xiang Shaolong noticed

that he was staring at the area where he stood and was so nervous that he could see the vein popping on his forehead.

Amongst the people who had their backs to him, two to three of them were stout looking men and most likely is part of his gang.

On the other side of the street opposite this masquerade hawker, 2 persons saw Xiang Shaolong riding over and hurriedly snuck behind a tree, obviously up to no good.

However Xiang Shaolong was thinking about something else.

It's not strange that someone will want to hatch a plot to kill him but the strange thing is how did that person manage to know his route and timetable so accurately.

The only explanation is that the other party knows that King Zhuangxiang had summoned him into the Palace, therefore they are able to set a death trap for him on this only route to the Palace.

And judging by the numbers, his enemy was not afraid that he would have escorts because when they made the plans they would not have expected him to travel alone.

He can't help but feel secretly startled once he thought of this.

By now he can almost be sure that the person who wants to kill him is Lord Yangquan because he is the only one who can be sure of the King of Qin's

every move through Lady Xiuli and he is the only one who has the guts and power to deal with him.

He'd actually turned to deal with him after he has dealt with Jing Jun?

The sound of a horse carriage was heard.

Four horse carriages carting hay came towards him, with a rider on each carriage. They were split into 2 carriages in each group and riding towards him close to the pedestrian path on the left and right sides of the road, leaving a few feet of space in between and enough for him to run straight across.

Just by looking at the time, place and way the horse carriages appeared, Xiang Shaolong knows that something is wrong.

At this point of life and death, he dare not delay and he held Jifeng's reins lightly as he pretended not to notice and rode towards the horse carriages and at the same time secretly drew out 2 steel needles from his waist and hid them in his palms.

Both sides got closer to each other.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking it hilarious. He clasped the horse's belly lightly with his thighs and Jifeng who has been his steed for quite some time already understands his needs and immediately increased its speed and in an instant was riding between the 4 carriages.

This move was totally beyond the expectations of the other party and the 4 men riding the carriages all cried out in unison and revealed a sinister look.

The hay was thrown into the sky and there was an archer hidden in each of the carriage of hay. They stood up from the hay, cocked their arrows and at the same time aimed it at Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong roared and Jifeng dashed forward. At the same time he waved his hands and the needles flew towards the back.

Before the archers in the 2 front carriages had a chance to shoot, the flying needles were already embedded in their faces and they fell back into the haystack.

The other 2 blindly shot their arrows in their haste and lost their aim. The arrows flew past his back, crisscrossing each other.

Xiang Shaolong chortled and Jifeng ran full speed ahead and in an instant, disappeared far away into the long street and there's nothing his enemies can do.

Xiang Shaolong met King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji with her 'son' in the inner hall of the Imperial Palace and naturally Lu Buwei was there as well.

The hall was elegantly decorated and King Zhuangxiang sat alone at the head on a raised dais while Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong sat on his left and Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan sat on the right, each of them with a table in front.

The palace maids came in and laid out the food and wine and retreated. The guards were standing guard outside, which makes this lunch has the atmosphere of a family gathering.

Xiao Pan's attitude was serious and did not sneak a peek at Xiang Shaolong at all.

Zhu Ji was also more reserved and although she's even more beautiful now and is not as forward like before.

The huge windows on both sides of the hall was wide open and they can see the curving corridors outside, the lush woods and flowers, serene and quiet without any human voices at all.

King Zhuangxiang said with a smile, "Premier told me this morning that Shaolong will be leaving in a few day's time to help me capture Zhao Mu so that I can vent my hatred. Both Empress Ji and I are very touched so we must invite Shaolong over immediately for a meal as a boost to your journey."

Xiang Shaolong felt a great liking towards King Zhuangxiang because not only is he gentle, but there is a sincerity about him that comes from the bottom of his heart.

Maybe because he was held hostage in Zhao for a long period of time and suffered humiliation there, he did not have the haughty air of King Xiaocheng.

Just looking at how devoted he is towards Zhu Ji and his gratitude at Lu

Buwei's help, combining forces with this great merchant to deal with his own countrymen, one can tell how much importance he places on relationships.

And there's another reason why Xiang Shaolong feels especially for him.

In this world, he is the only one who knows that the leader of the world's strongest state, only has 3 more years to live.

He hurriedly bowed his head and gave his thanks.

King Zhuangxiang suddenly said kindly, "My son has something to say?"

Zhu Ji and Lu Buwei's eyes turned towards Xiao Pan and the look in their eyes were filled with unending love like King Zhuangxiang as well.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing, all these 3 people treated Xiao Pan like their precious son, but he's actually a fake.

At the same time he was shocked. Xiao Pan must have heard the killer of his mother, Zhao Mu's name and hence revealed a strange look of alarm which was witnessed by King Zhuangxiang.

Xiao Pan looked at Xiang Shaolong and said with disappointment, "Grand Tutor has to leave without even having any chance to teach me anything."

The 3 of them laughed.

Zhu Ji furrowed her pretty brows, "Will this be too much of a risk for Grand

Tutor?”

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “The more dangerous it is, the more suited it is for me. Do not worry Empress Ji, I will be careful.”

Lu Buwei chuckled, “I am very confident of Shaolong and knows that he will certainly succeed.”

King Zhuangxiang loves Xiao Pan a lot and said to him with a smile, “I am extremely happy that my son respects and loves his tutor so much.” He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and added, “If Grand Tutor is free these few days, you can spend more time in the Palace to teach the Crown Prince. The way you blocked Wang Jian’s 3 arrows at the square yesterday, my son was so excited that he kept telling everyone about it!”

Xiang Shaolong can’t help but exchange a look with Xiao Pan and secretly exclaim that he’s formidable. By doing this now, if this lad becomes especially close towards him in future, no one will suspect that it’s due to any other hidden reasons. He agreed politely immediately.

King Zhuangxiang sighed and said, “I had a hard life in the past and was downtrodden in Handan, humiliated and looked down upon. I’ve never had the chance to study properly and have to live everyday in fear, wondering if I will survive the next day. That’s why the first thing I want to do for my son after his return to Xianyang is to find him good tutors, so that he...”

Zhu Ji pouted and stared at him, saying coquettishly, “Your Majesty got more than 10 people to teach the Crown Prince in turns at one go, I’m really

worried that Zheng'er will be exhausted."

King Zhuangxiang smiled, not at all unhappy that she has interrupted his words.

Lu Buwei chuckled, "Does Empress Ji wants to listen to my grand plan of tutoring Prince Zheng?"

The 4 of them looked towards him in surprise at the same time.

Lu Buwei looked at Xiao Pan with the eyes of a 'benign father' before turning to King Zhuangxiang and said, "As the saying goes, ask when in doubt, learn when unskilled. Learned scholars, military swordsmen, weren't they all ignorant initially and made achievements through learning and practice. Since that is the case, all the more a leader will have to study."

King Zhuangxiang was stunned, "Does Premier Lu think that the education plan I have arranged for my son is not enough? The people that I have invited to teach my son are all the best in their own fields. For example Qin Qing's poetry, song and music are not only the best in Great Qin, but she's also admired by others in the 6 states and is on par with Wei's Learned Lady Ji. Could Premier have an even better candidate?"

Only now did Xiang Shaolong realize that Widow Qing's surname is Qin and she's also one of the Crown Prince's Grand Tutors. No wonder Emperor Qin in future, heh! Which means Xiao Pan, will build a 'Memorial of Qing Dais' in praise of this female tutor of his.

Zhu Ji and Xiao Pan looked at Lu Buwei curiously, waiting to see how he is going to reply King Zhuangxiang.

Lu Buwei said confidently, “As the Crown Prince, Prince Zheng of course need not fear no one will teach him. However going to extremes is not good as well and sometimes when there are too many different views, one may be at a loss as to how to proceed. So in view of this point, I have summoned the world’s learned, capable, skilled and amazing people to gather and give their opinions on governing a country, from the principles of governing to farming and their conclusions will be written into a book which will cover every topic. When the book is completed, once the Crown Prince has it on hand, then there will be nothing he does not know.

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed, for this ‘son’ of his, Lu Buwei really went into a lot of trouble.

King Zhuangxiang chuckled, “To think that Premier can think of such an idea. If Premier needs any help, just let me know!”

Lunch passed amid such light-hearted and warm atmosphere.

After the meal King Zhuangxiang and Zhu Ji returned to their Palace to rest and Lu Buwei, as the Premier, is also a very busy man and does not have the time for long chats. Xiang Shaolong told him about the attack on his way here and he left hurriedly after listening to the account, leaving only Xiang Shaolong who led Xiao Pan to the square to practice his swordplay.

Xiao Pan is no longer the same boy and no matter where he goes there’ll be a

big group of imperial guards and palace maids accompanying him and the two of them could not even talk about what's in their hearts.

Before they started the sparring, Xiao Pan can't help but ask quietly, "Teacher! Can you not go to Handan? Without you, I will have nothing left."

Xiang Shaolong saw that even the guards nearest to them were about 5 feet away so he pretended to correct his swordplay and asked, "Did they treat you well?"

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened as he said, "Very well! I really treat them as my birth parents."

Xiang Shaolong reprimanded him, "This will be the last time you think of yourself as Xiao Pan. From this moment on, even when in front of me, you will be Ying Zheng."

Xiao Pan understood and nodded his head before asking again, "Can you not go?"

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "Remember our gentleman's agreement, Zhao Mu is mine, the King of Zhao is yours."

As he finished his words, he slashed his sword across.

Xiao Pan jumped aside agilely and struck a pose.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly shocked on seeing this.

This lad has something that he never had before, and that is great confidence, which made a great change to his manner.

Damn!

This is the giant who will unify the world and become China's first Emperor in future.

Once he thought of this, a rush of uncontrollable feelings seem to well up from his heart.

Right at this time an attendant came to announce that Qin Qing is here.

Although Xiang Shaolong very much wanted to take a look at this Widow Qing whose fame is on par with Ji Yanran, to see how beautiful and delicate she is. However he has no excuse to do so and it's not something within courteous norms. Besides, Xiao Pan had to bath and change so he had to return to the Wu residence.

He had just stepped through the door when the guard came to report that Wang Jian has come to look for him and is now chatting with Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang at the main hall, so he hurried in.

Wang Jian was joyous when he saw Xiang Shaolong and came forward to hold his hand in greeting.

Xiang Shaolong saw that he was dressed in an ordinary warrior's outfit that exuded a strong military air and can't help but feel a sense of camaraderie as

he replied earnestly, “Sorry to have made Brother Wang wait so long!”

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang stood up and the former said, “Grand Tutor Wang is here to bid farewell to Shaolong.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Farewell?”

Wang Jian replied excitedly, “Yes! I am setting off to the northern frontier immediately to go to war with the Xiong Nus.*”

Xiang Shaolong felt uncomfortable and secretly thought that if he is going to battlefield, he’ll need the consent of King Zhuangxiang and Lu Buwei.

Ever since Shang Yang’s reforms in Qin, the tribe’s leadership power was wrestled away and they lost the right to succession. Governmental and noble ranks were granted based on military contributions. Any reassignment of more than 50 soldiers will require the approval of the King of Qin. This was an unprecedented move at that time. This made the central pillar of Qin power reach its peak.

All the great generals only hold one half of the token and without the King of Qin’s other half of the token, it’ll be difficult to reassign troops. Besides the military token, the King of Qin’s written document stamped with his imperial seal is also needed before it is recognized.

Therefore it is a lot more difficult to rebel in Qin as compared to the other countries.

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang knows that the 2 of them have things to say so they gave an excuse and left.

After the 2 of them sat down, Xiang Shaolong ordered the maids to serve scented tea as he wondered if Lu Buwei is so intolerant after all and deliberately transferred Wang Jian away so that he would not be able to fight with him for attention. Once he thought of this, he felt greatly apologetic.

Wang Jian asked quizzically, “Why do Brother Xiang suddenly look so terrible?”

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, “Brother Wang has just been promoted to the Crown Prince’s Grand Tutor and now you have been transferred away. I feel injustice for you. No! I must speak to his Majesty on Brother Wang’s behalf.”

Wang Jian is a man with both brains and brawn. He was stunned for a moment before he suddenly understood and he was touched, saying, “Only now do I know that Brother Xiang really cares for me. But you’ve misunderstood, I was the one who spoke about this mission to his Majesty. Hai! To tell you the truth, seniority and experience plays a huge part in the military. Without some personal connections, one can forget about thinking of leading an army into battle. This time they did not want Brother Xiang to get the position of Grand Tutor so they had no choice but to get me out to duel with Brother Xiang. Now my status is no longer the same. When I met his Majesty this morning, he asked me what wish do I have and I immediately said I would like to offer my services at the northern frontier. After discussion with Premier Lu, His Majesty asked me again the strategy I have in mind and

he than gave me the token on the spot and let me be the main commander at the northern frontier. This has always been my dream and I did not expect it to come true. I am here to tell you the good news and to thank you as well.”

This time it is Xiang Shaolong’s turn to be stunned. For a long time, the Xiong Nus and the Hus have been trying to invade the borders of Qin, Zhao and Yan and the 3 states, in order to gain control of central plains, have always used the method of building long walls along the border to keep them at bay but there’s still nothing they can do to the strong nomadic groups that travel around the high Mongolian plains.

Therefore every thinks that it is an arduous and thankless task to go into battle with Xiong Nus, and one may very well lose his life if he’s unlucky.

The Xiong Nus are nomadic and have hard lives therefore they are especially predatory. Using the advantage of the speed of their cavalry, their strategy is to attack when the enemy is retreating and retreat when the enemy is attacking. They frequently encroach into Central Plains and attack and pillage the various states whose main concentration is on farming.

And Qin is exactly one of the states facing this problem.

When Li Mu offended the King of Zhao, he was reassigned to the northern border and everyone knows that it is a form of punishment. Therefore, how could he have expected that it was Wang Jian who volunteered and begged to be reassigned to the northern border?

Looking at how concerned Xiang Shaolong is, Wang Jian said with a smile, “I can’t blame Brother Xiang for not understanding. Ever since I was young, my thinking has always been different from others.”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved and now he became curious as he asked, “Why don’t Brother Wang tell me about it?”

Wang Jian drank the scented tea in one gulp before replying seriously, “I have always admired King Wuling of Zhao*. If not for his great bravery in implementing the 2 reforms, the state of Zhao not only became one of the stronger states and he also changed the way of fighting battles in the world.”

Xiang Shaolong has long heard of this story and he nodded his head in agreement, “Is Brother Wang referring to his Hu uniform and horse archery?”

Wang Jiang became excited, “Exactly. At that time the clothes of the Zhaos had long sleeves, thick belts, wide collars and huge bottoms. Such long and huge robes is extremely inconvenient when horse riding or archery. Therefore King Wuling ignored the country’s senior officials old fashioned arguments about it being ‘against the people’s hearts that rules are changed’ and ordered the whole army to change into Hu uniform. The huge sleeves and long robes were changed into a refreshing look with smaller sleeves with short coats, belts and boots.”

On hearing this, Xiang Shaolong thought it was interesting as well and said with a laugh, “This reform affects their reputation and the change in society, and naturally there will be strong opposition to it.”

Wang Jian gave a cold snort, "Compared to dying for the country, what is this little reform?"

He continued, "Another more thorough reform is to abandon the method of using carriages as the main force of attacks and change to using cavalry as the main force of attacks. In a short time he built up a huge and strong team of cavalry who not only swept the Xiong Nus but also Central Plains, becoming invincible and numerous generals gained fame. If not because of the appearance of that muddleheaded King Xiaocheng, we might not even win the battle of Changping even if we have Bai Qi, the unparalleled military genius with us."

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, "Therefore you want to go to the northern frontier to follow in King Wuling's footsteps and bring a whole new change."

Wang Jian smiled confidently, "Although I am experienced in battles, I've always been on the frontlines and never had the chance to lead an army. When will I ever have the chance if we're fighting the other states in the east and south. Therefore I volunteered so that I can have a taste of leading an army. At the same time I can practice my horse archery and find some Xiong Nus to sharpen my sword with."

He continued in a low voice, "At that time King Wuling swept a thousand miles across the land and he took over the territory of the Linhu people. Those Linhu who are good in horse archery also became Zhao's cavalry, which greatly increased their strength. I've always had this idea as well. This is called killing two birds with one stone. As long as we don't get rid of the Xiong Nus, how can we talk about unifying the world?"

Xiang Shaolong reached out and placed his hand on his shoulder and said with sincerity, "Brother Wang is indeed an extraordinary man to be able to think of so many advantages from a task that everyone regards as torturous. Your precious sword and arrows will definitely lead the way when the time comes in future to unify the world."

This is the first time Wang Jian met a person who did not say that he is an idiot. He raised his hand and grabbed his arm tightly and said with gratitude, "Brother Xiang is the extraordinary man instead, the only reason I have this day..."

Xiang Shaolong interrupted him, "If you mention that again, then you're not treating me as your brother."

Wang Jian's eyes reddened as he said earnestly, "Brother Xiang, please do not think that I am regarding myself highly. The mission to conquer the north this time is fraught with danger and I might not even come back alive. I came here today.... Hai!"

Xiang Shaolong saw him hesitating and asked curiously, "If Brother Wang has anything to say, please go right ahead!"

Wang Jian blushed as he said, "Actually I have been impressed with Brother Xiang once I met you, I wonder if we can become sworn brothers. We will share weal and woe together in future, if there is any ounce of deceit, may I be destroyed by heaven and earth."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed joyously, "I should be the one who is not good

enough. But I have 3 other loyal friends, why don't we copy how Liu, Guan and Zhang sworn brotherhood at the peach garden and let our names go down in history as loyal brothers."

Wang Jian was confused, "You're talking about what Liu, Guang and Zhang about sworn brotherhood at what peach?"

This time it was Xiang Shaolong's turn to feel greatly embarrassed. Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei's sworn brotherhood happened during the era of the Three Kingdoms so naturally Wang Jian has never heard of this.

He immediately gave some nonsensical answers and muddled his way through.

He found Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo and the four of them, together with a recovering Jing Jun, made the serious vow of brotherhood together at Jing Jun's bedside.

A big feast followed it before Wang Jian left happily.

That night Xiang Shaolong was in a great mood and had fun with Wu Tingfang and the rest, throwing aside all his worries and his lovesickness for Ji Yanran for the time being.

Suddenly, Xiang Shaolong felt as if he is at the happiest and proudest moment of his life.

As soon as he fetches Ji Yanran back to Xianyang and capture Zhao Mu, then he will have nothing more to ask for.

Chapter 7

Love at the Qin Palace

The next morning, Tu Xian's best advisor Xiao Yuetan came to look for Xiang Shaolong. The 2 of them sat and the small hall in the inner courtyard and Xiao Yuetan said, "It was the Premier who asked me to look for Grand Tutor, to see if there's anything I can be of help."

Xiang Shaolong had too much fun last night and drank a little too much as well so he replied with a heavy head, "There's no need for Mister to be so polite, just call me Shaolong. No matter what rank I hold, we're still friends who have been through thick and thin so we can speak as equals." At the same time he tried to figure out the reason he has come.

Xiao Yuetan saw that he did not put on any airs at all and was secretly overjoyed. After expressing his humbleness, he told him the reason for the visit, "It's to make it more convenient for Shaolong to work in Zhao. If you depend purely on trying to disguise yourself, not only is it troublesome but inappropriate as well. Therefore the Premier has ordered me to specially help Shaolong, Xiao Jun, Brother Teng and Brother Wu make 4 exquisite masks based on the shape of your faces. You'll just need to add some minor details like change the hairstyle and color and I guarantee that you'll be able to hide from Zhao Mu. Of course! Shaolong and the others will still have to work on your voices and mannerisms, otherwise you'll still be recognized."

Xiang Shaolong felt as if he has just woke up from a dream and asked happily,

“Premier indeed thinks of everything, I wonder if you’ve brought the things here.”

Xiao Yuetan proudly took down the little package he has carrying on his back and opened it, and indeed there are 4 masks inside.

He took out one of them to let Xiang Shaolong wear it and immediately Xiang Shaolong turned into a coarse looking man with a face full of beard.

Xiao Yuetan reached out with his fingers and started touching the area around his eyes and said with a smile, “The most unique thing about this design is that the connecting parts are mostly at where the hair is. For example the hole here which reveals your eyes, not only has it made your eyebrows thicker, but it also made the shape of your eyes rounder so even for those who knows you, they won’t be able to recognize you from the shape of your eyes. As for the rest of the connecting parts, just apply a layer of powdered oil and it’ll be seamless.”

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly took a copper mirror for a look and was extremely impressed.

Xiao Yuetan took out a chalk and made some markings on the mask before removing it for him, saying “The mask still need some refining, I’ll be able to hand it over within 3 days.”

Xiang Shaolong replied with astonishment, “Mister Xiao is indeed gifted in your art, you’re able to make such a well-fitted mask based only on your memory. What material is this?”

Naturally Xiao Yuetan was overjoyed that someone found him impressive and he replied happily, “This is made from a precious beast called ‘leopard deer’ from the northwest. It’s a little larger than hunting dogs and extremely rare. I collected them at a high price and only managed to get 4 skins and now I’ve used them all up at one go.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that such a rare beast that he’s never even heard of before most likely became extinct because of Xiao Yuetan. After thanking him, he called for Teng Yi and the rest to let them try on the masks to see if any changes need to be made.

Teng Yi and the rest all expressed admiration for the masks and they became more excited about the trip to Handan.

Jing Jun’s physique is so good that it’s unbelievable. He was able to move freely in just a few days, but of course he still cannot turn somersaults.

When Xiao Yuetan removed the mask for Teng Yi, he asked in bewilderment, “Has Brother Teng encountered some joyous event, why have your whole countenance changed.”

For the first time Teng Yi blushed as he hemmed and hawed his way though. Neither does he dare to look at the others in the eyes.

After Xiao Yuetan wrapped everything up, he lowered his voice and said, “About the ambush on Shaolong yesterday on the streets, Premier has already sent someone to investigate. They should be from Weinan Martial Arts School, because 2 of their warriors passed away coincidentally yesterday

and they carried out the funeral secretly.”

Once he said that, everyone knows in their hearts that Tu Xian has bribed someone from the martial arts school, otherwise how else would he know such tightly guarded news.

Xiao Yuetan added, “But Premier would like to ask Shaolong to tolerate this for the time being, because he already has an even better plan which can get rid of Lord Yangquan and Qiu Risheng at one go, so he would not want to put them on their guard at this juncture.”

Jing Jun was furious, “They come and deal with us as and when they like, sooner or later someone will be killed by them!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that Lu Buwei is getting more and more formidable, no longer is he intent on just getting a moment’s revenge. This type of ruthlessness indeed makes one’s heart run cold and after stopping Jing Jun, he said, “Mister Xiao, please tell the Premier not to worry, we know what to do.”

Obviously Xiao Yuetan is on good terms with Jing Jun and he pulled him aside to explain and guarantee that they will not let Qiu Risheng and his men off before leaving the Wu residence.

They discussed the problem of security for the Wu family and came up with a plan. Xiang Shaolong told them, “All of you get ready, once we get the masks 3 days later, we’ll depart immediately.”

He turned towards Teng Yi and said with a laugh, "Brother Teng! Better thoroughly enjoy the next few precious days!"

Teng Yi said with a wry smile, "Even you're making fun of me!"

At this point in time an attendant came and informed that the Empress has summoned Xiang Shaolong to enter the Palace immediately.

Xiang Shaolong obeyed the order with consternation and left the residence.

Naturally this time he brought along a huge entourage of Wu family warriors, not like the last time when he traveled alone.

After Zhu Ji ordered the maids and attendants to leave, only Zhu Ji, Xiao Pan and Xiang Shaolong was left in the huge pavilion in the imperial garden. Even the guards who are nearest to them are at least 10 feet away and they can only see, but not hear them.

With Xiao Pan around, naturally Xiang Shaolong is not worried that Zhu Ji would try to 'entice' him.

That would have been a huge headache for him.

Zhu Ji filled up the wine cup that was on the stone table for him and after trying to get him to drink, her pretty face blushed from the wine she's drunk, making her look even more alluring.

This beauty indeed has the charisma to fall a city and her charm makes one

think of the term beauties are a source of trouble, especially when Xiang Shaolong remembers what will befall her in future.

Zhu Ji's expression turned serious and she said earnestly, "I asked Shaolong here today with his Majesty's approval, to allow us mother and son to express our gratitude. Now I have no other wants, my only wish is to groom Zheng'er so that he can be a good ruler in future." Her gaze moved towards Xiao Pan, revealing a look of motherly love.

She added in a low voice, "Luckily this child has not disappointed me!"

Xiao Pan's eyes reddened slightly and moved closer to Zhu Ji.

Xiang Shaolong understood.

This is very reasonable. Even though Zhu Ji is a natural flirt, but after staying in Handan for so many years where she can be used by anyone, she is long tired of such life.

Therefore she is especially treasures the new life with her husband and son, or at least this is what she is feeling for now.

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head, "Shaolong understands what Empress Ji is thinking about."

Zhu Ji took a deep look at him before turning to look at the pretty garden scene surrounding them. She finally gave a satisfied sigh and said, "I know you understand me the most. Seeing you, is not only like seeing a friend, but

it's like seeing family and there's no need to hide anything from you. If you encounter any problems, don't be afraid to tell me. Some things will be easier if I speak to his Majesty instead of asking Premier to report on your behalf."

Xiang Shaolong has no idea how sincere her words were, but with her current status, it's indeed out of the norm that she would say something like that.

Zhi Ji tapped Xiao Pan's shoulder and said, "Zheng'er! Grand Tutor Qin is here, go quickly!"

Xiao Pan stood up reluctantly and followed the attendant who was standing far away. Xiang Shaolong knows that the time for fleshly conquests is here and waited quietly.

Zhu Ji rolled her eyes at him and said, "I did not put on the airs of an Empress in front of you, why won't you try to speak even a little more?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that there's only the two of them here and replied with a relaxed laugh, "It's beneficial for both Empress Ji and me to conduct ourselves as befitting to a ruler and his official."

Zhu Ji smiled, "Between us, we need not spell out a lot of things, but I'm really very grateful to you. Hai! If I had known, I should have given you my body while we were still in Handan, at least we'll leave a beautiful memory behind. Now in order to become a good Empress and mother, all personal desires will have to be placed aside. I hope Shaolong can understand my heart."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect that even after Zhu Ji became the Empress of Qin, she is still so direct with her choice of words. Obviously a leopard can never change its spots.

For a moment he could not think of a topic to talk about.

Zhu Ji pouted slightly, “Look at you! Became a mute again!”

Xiang Shaolong smiled wryly, “What can I say? Should I express happiness or unhappiness.”

Zhu Ji said offhandedly, “I think you’re mostly happy, because you need not fear that I will implicate you.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling hilarious. Women are so strange. She’s the one who tells you not to get involved with her, but when you really did not try to entice her, she’ll feel unhappy instead, how contradictory.

Zhu Ji is aware that she has gone a little overboard so she sighed and her expression turned icy after that, “Shaolong’s trip back to Handan this time, can you help me kill 2 people?”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and looked at her as he replied, “Go ahead!”

Zhu Ji seemed to have turned into another person, her eyes filled with murderous intent as she uttered each word slowly, “The first one is another of Zhao Mu’s lackey Le Cheng, but don’t ask me why, I don’t even wish to think about it.”

Xiang Shaolong knows that she must have been greatly humiliated by this person, otherwise her hatred would not have been so deep so he nodded, "I'll definitely get this done for you!"

A little of the murderous look went out as Zhu Ji's eyes revealed a look of gentleness and her pretty lips uttered, "But forget about it if it's too dangerous, most important thing is for you to return safely. Without you, Zhu Ji will feel that I've lost a good confidante. Ever since I first saw you, I've felt that even if you do not become my lover, you will become my good friend."

Xiang Shaolong is starting to be confused.

Are her words truly from the bottom of her heart, or just a way to pull him over to her side?

He has seen how she can charm Zhao Mu and Guo Kai silly so he's very guarded.

But of course on the surface he pretended to be touched.

However he could not hide it from her and Zhu Ji pouted, "Did you think I was lying to you? Heaven above be my witness, if I, Zhu Ji speaks even a word of falsehood, I will not have a good end!"

Xiang Shaolong was startled and hurriedly said, "Lower your voice, it'll be terrible if someone else hears this!"

Zhu Ji stared at him and said with a huff, "Coward! Do you believe me now!"

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head helplessly and sighed, "Who is the other person? Guo Kai?" Then he shook his head and added, "Of course it's not him, otherwise Empress Ji would have forced me to kill him the other day!"

Zhu Ji was still fuming as she replied icily, "At least you know how to use your brains, of course it's not Guo Kai. Amongst those hateful people, he can be considered one of the nicest to me."

Xiang Shaolong was curious and asked, "Stop trying to be mysterious, tell me quickly!"

Zhu Ji covered her mouth and smiled as she said playfully, "Does it mean that no matter who is the person I say, you will follow my instructions to kill?"

Xiang Shaolong was flabbergasted, "You still said that I was your confidante, why do you always want to see me embarrassed and in a spot?"

Zhu Ji's heart softened and she replied with a coquettish smile, "All right! I'll not put you in a spot, the other person is... is..."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, "Do you want me to beg you before you'll tell me?"

Zhu Ji lowered her head and when she raised it again, tears flowed from the corner of her eyes as she said piteously, "When his Majesty and Premier Lu escaped from Handan and Zhao Mu found out about it, he sent Le Cheng and a big group of ferocious men who dashed into our house. They killed all the men servants while the women were all gang raped. That violent and horrible

scene is still fresh in my mind even now. Even if I don't think about it in the day, the terrible scene will be reenacted in my dreams. The person who gave the orders was Le Cheng, do you think he deserves to be killed?"

Hot blood rushed through Xiang Shaolong's veins as an icy, murderous look gleamed in his eyes.

Zhu Ji lowered her head and continued, "The next day that fake son of mine and I was taken to Zhao Mu's place and placed under house arrest. Those few days were the most disgusting in my life and at that time I made a blood vow that if I can escape in future, I'll definitely avenge this."

Xiang Shaolong reminded her, "You have yet to say who the other person is!"

Zhu Ji said lightly, "It's Zhao Ya!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "What?"

Zhu Ji asked coldly, "Why? Can't bear to strike now!"

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand why she was trying to convince him earlier. He was feeling very uncomfortable and asked in a low voice, "What has she actually done?"

Zhi Ji actually chuckled and laughed daintily. She said as she shook with mirth, "I was lying to you, I just detest that hateful look of yours when you were unmoved towards me, that's why I used Zhao Ya to scare you." Her pretty face turned frosty as she added, "But other than this, the other things were

all true. If the situation permits, bring me Le Cheng's head! Just take it that I'm begging you!"

Looking at her beautiful face filled with sad tears, Xiang Shaolong only feels as if his head is getting heavier. This woman is really difficult to deal with. It seems that Heaven sent her to this world so that she can toy around with men, no wonder even Zhao Mu cannot bear to kill her.

Zhu Ji lifted her sleeves to wipe her tears and said quietly, "Be careful! If it's anyone else, I'll definitely say that I can guarantee him wealth and riches. But I know that you're an extraordinary man who holds no regard for fame at all, so I can only express my gratitude to you. But if you have any request, as long as you tell me, I will definitely try my very best to do it for you."

She suddenly smiled faintly, "For example the world's most beautiful Widow Qing, does Shaolong want me to introduce you to her? I don't believe that she can resist your charms."

Xiang Shaolong stared at her without humor and he stood up and said, "If Empress Ji do not have any further instructions, then please excuse me for I have to return home to prepare for the trip to Handan."

Zhu Ji looked at him forlornly and stood up as she said, "You're so hard handed to keep using the Handan trip to put pressure. I have no choice but to let you go."

She added with a smile, "But that is exactly what I like about you. Hai! It won't be easy to find a chance like this in future where I can talk with you

openly.”

Xiang Shaolong was touched on hearing this.

Zhu Ji has only become an Empress for a short time so she still retained her past characteristics. Earlier, it was only at the beginning that she looked confident but she subconsciously later reverted to her flirting ways.

No matter! There is now a huge chasm between them that cannot be crossed and regardless of how much they admire each other, they can only keep it in their hearts in future.

The 2 of them faced each other quietly for a moment before Xiang Shaolong bid farewell.

Chapter 8

Audacity

The attendant led Xiang Shaolong away from the Imperial Garden, walking along the corridors, passing through buildings and gardens towards the Outer Palace.

Along the way guards were posted everywhere, obviously security has been tightened since his last visit.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed, was the Qin Palace being prepared for some changes?

He thought of how Lord Yangquan first wounded Jing Jun, then found people to openly ambush him in the streets. His actions can be considered uncontrolled so it's not strange if he were to rebel. The only question is how many in the Qin military stands on his side!

Of course he's not worried.

History books have already stated that before Emperor Qin rejected Lu Buwei, he has always remained undefeated, and that will only happen 10 years later.

Just as he was lost in thoughts, Xiao Pan's voice was heard coming from his left, "Grand Tutor Xiang!"

Xiang Shaolong turned towards the direction of the voice in surprise to see Xiao Pan running out from single log cabin with bamboos planted outside, past the grass field, towards the corridor.

The attendants and guards hurriedly fell to their knees in fright.

Xiang Shaolong was still deciding if he's supposed to kneel since he is the Crown Prince's Grand Tutor when Xiao Pan cried out, "Grand Tutor, dispense with ceremony!" and at the same time made an eye at him.

Xiang Shaolong was sharp enough and walked to a corner with him and asked with his brows furrowed, "Aren't you supposed to be having lessons?"

Xiao Pan panted as he replied, "I know that Grand Tutor will pass by this area, so I've been keeping an eye out."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is there anything you want to say?"

Xiao Pan was about to speak when a sweet but furious sounding lady's voice rose up from behind them, "Crown Prince!"

The 2 of them were feeling guilty and they were both startled as they turned to look at where the voice came from.

They saw an extremely beautiful and slender lady with her hair adorned with a sparrow pin, hair swaying as she walked and wearing a long white robe, seemingly glittering under the rays of sunlight. Her steps light, she seems to be floating on the lush green grass as she walked towards them, her

movements elegant, as if she's a beautiful goddess who has come down to earth. Especially when the wide sleeves at her side was fluttering as she walked, which emphasized even more strongly her gracefulness.

Even more startling was her facial features, which has a rare purity seldom seen in this era, like a carved statue. Her eyes were clear and bright, her cheekbones were a little too high but when coupled with her straight nose, it gives one the feeling of uncommon grace, an elegance that makes one's heart shudder, making others feel that she is a woman with her own mind, a determined beauty.

Her dainty brows were long and curved towards her temples, showing how dark and shiny her pupils were.

Her phoenix eyes and dainty brows has an air of classical beauty and this is the first time Xiang Shaolong has seen such allure and uniqueness.

Even with Xiang Shaolong's immovable attitude towards women now, he still can't help but feel his heart lurch.

Her pert bosom, slender waist, long legs, all gave her an air of dignity that is beyond any of the other women in this era. When compared to Ji Yanran they both have their winning ways and it's difficult to compare who is the better.

But at this point in time her pretty face was tight, cold as frost, her expression stern as she stared at Xiao Pan, "Ask if ignorant, learn if unable to perform, listen to scholars if unable to learn, this has been the way since time

memorial. Crown Prince, you are so easily distracted and has no heart in your studies, how will you rule the country and the people in future?”

Xiao Pan is after all still a child so naturally he hid behind Xiang Shaolong in fright, and it became a situation where it seems the 2 Grand Tutors were having a confrontation.

The attendants who were leading the way were so frightened they retreated to one side, afraid of being implicated.

The guards around them averted their eyes, pretending that they did not see anything at all.

Although Qin Qing was furious, her expression is a chilly calm, her breathing even, her hands behind her back. She lifted her head to look Xiang Shaolong who was half a head taller than her and asked gently, “This is the Grand Tutor Xiang that Crown Prince Zheng has been talking about all the time?”

Xiang Shaolong looked at her pure and regal expression and cleared his mind of his imagination before replying with a straight face, “It is indeed I, and I would appreciate Grand Tutor Qin kind advices.”

Qin Qing smiled slightly, “Grand Tutor Xiang is being too polite! Crown Prince! Aren’t you going to walk out, a man must dare to admit to his actions, and take responsibility.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “It’s not that serious, right?”

Qin Qing's expression turned icy as she replied, "There is a big problem with Grand Tutor Xiang's words. It is just a small matter to slip away from studies, but to cower on seeing someone, when he becomes the ruler in future and still has such a disposition, how can he handle the country's affairs? If Grand Tutor Xiang only knows how to protect and abide with the Crown Prince, how can you answer to his Majesty who has bestowed such an important task of teaching the Crown Prince?"

Xiang Shaolong answered with a wry smile, "Don't make it sound so serious, all right? Take it that I'm at fault, I'll wave the white flag and surrender, all right?" He reached out and patted Xiao Pan who was still behind him and said, "Crown Prince Zheng! Come! Show Grand Tutor Qin how heroic and manly you are by daring to admit to your actions and impress her!"

Qin Qing was dumbfounded on hearing that. How can a senior official talk like that, as if playing a fool.

Xiao Pan walked out on hearing that and stood next to Xiang Shaolong, puffing his chest out and sucking his stomach in, posing like a great man but his tiny face was trying to contain his laughter and he looked totally hilarious.

Qin Qing's eyes settled on Xiao Pan's face and seeing how his little face was puffed red from trying to control his laughter, can't help but chuckled although she knows she must not laugh. She turned her head aside and covered her face with her sleeve.

On seeing that, how can Xiao Pan control himself any longer and started clutching his stomach and chortled.

Xiang Shaolong can't help but laugh as well.

Laughter is the most contagious, especially in such a solemn environment, and the attendants and guards around them all were secretly smiling as well.

Qin Qing lowered her sleeve, revealing her face that was wiped of any trace of a smile and arched her delicate brows as she softly reprimanded, "Laughed enough?"

Xiao Pan and Xiang Shaolong were so stunned that they immediately looked serious and stood straight.

But once a can of laughter has been opened, it's difficult to control. Right now not only Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Pan's expressions looked strange, this pretty widow is not much better as she tried to look serious and chided, "No one since time memorial can become wise without studying. But not concentrating on one's studies is akin to not learning anything at all. Crown Prince Zheng should reflect on your behavior today. If you think that you cannot concentrate on your studies, Qin Qing can only resign from her post as Grand Tutor."

Xiao Pan hurriedly replied, "Grand Tutor Qin, Xiao Zheng will not dare to do so anymore, I guarantee there won't be a next time. Hai! What do I have to memorize again this time?"

Qin Qing is obviously a person who looks stern on the outside but softhearted on the inside. She sighed and said, "This time I only want you to earnestly reflect. All right! That's all for today."

She turned towards Xiang Shaolong and before she has a chance to speak, Xiang Shaolong has already bowed towards her suavely with respect, his movements especially splendid.

Qin Qing was dazed on seeing this and she lowered her head, avoiding his heated gaze and bowed slightly before turning around and left gracefully.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad.

At least he fulfilled a wish and saw this rare beauty who has not disappointed him. To him, this is enough.

The Xiang Shaolong now no longer has the mood to hunt for beauties, unlike when he 'just arrived'.

Xiang Shaolong returned to the Wu residence and his father-in-law Wu Yingyuan has just sent off a group of powerful men from the Qin court and was in high spirits.

These few days Wu Yingyuan has been active with his socializing strategy, continuously giving away song courtesans and fine horses to those Qins who hold influential positions in order to set a foundation for their intended long stay in Qin. Otherwise, even if they have the support of the King of Qin and Lu Buwei and won't face any huge problems, but if people keep giving them small problems, it's still enough of a headache.

Wu Yingyuan is a businessman and is well aware that regardless of nationality or status, everyone is chasing after wealth and fame. Therefore he

emphasized on this point and in addition to his subtle methods, slowly made his way through the various obstacles.

Xiang Shaolong had an idea and followed Wu Yingxiong back to the great hall in the main building and after sitting down, told him about Xiao Yuetan's exquisite masks and added, "Initially I only planned to disguise myself as a merchant to sneak back to Handan and capture Zhao Mu in a surprise attack and be done with this matter. But these makes have greatly increased my confidence and I decided to go all out and do something great."

Wu Yingyuan is intelligent and he said with a laugh, "Money is no problem. Heh! When it comes to comparing wealth, I'm afraid Premier Lu is still not our match." He lowered his voice and added, "Do you want me to get you a batch of courtesans for you to present as gifts." He then chuckled, "I'm so silly, they might reveal your background."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that no matter how shameless he is, he will not treat women as merchandise and give them away. He laughed, "I only need a herd of warhorses of the finest quality who will not reveal our backgrounds."

Wu Yingyuan was slightly taken aback, "You really intend to go all out?"

Xiang Shaolong was impressed that Wu Yingyuan can understand his intention from just this little bit of information and replied, "Father-in-law can really make inferences, I really intend to go all out and deal with King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu in order to give vent to the anger that has been stuck in my chest."

Wu Yingyuan breathed out a gush of cold air and said, “My good son-in-law, you are the bravest person I’ve ever known, but this time you’ve certainly placed your bet on the right thing. When the Wu family left Zhao we poisoned all the animals in our farms so that the Zhaos will face a shortage in the supply of warhorses. If you bring warhorses to trade with them, I guarantee that they will come to welcome you instead.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Not only am I going to do business with them, I even want them to allow me to set up a farm in place of the Wu family. Father-in-law is most familiar with this trade, what sort of background must we use so that the Zhaos will find most believable?”

Wu Yingyuan furrowed his brow and thought for a moment before he banged the table and cried out, “I’ve thought of something. At Xiashui in the state of Chu there is a person famous for breeding horses, called ‘Horse Fanatic’ Dong Zhuang. The reason I’ve thought of this person is because he was originally a Zhao but because his father Dong Ping offended some powerful person and the whole family escaped to the state of Chu. Dong Ping had actually become a minor official who rears horses but maybe because of his character, the Chus treated him marginally and after he lost his official post, he went to live quietly in the wilderness and concentrated on keeping horses. If Shaolong masquerades as his descendent, firstly there won’t be much problem with your accent, secondly no one has ever seen Dong Kuang and you can use your identity as a Chu to trick Zhao Mu into believing that you’re a Chu spy sent to help him. I really cannot think of a more suitable person other than him to masquerade as.”

Xiang Shaolong cried out happily, “This is really ideal. Can Father-in-law

transfer 10 odd warhorses without any brandings so that I can pretend to be a generous herdsman?"

Wu Yingyuan grabbed his shoulder and chortled, "10 odd horses is not enough to claim generosity, you'll need at least a few hundred to a thousand, and they must be branded. Of course not with the character 'Wu' but with the character 'Dong', just let me take care of this matter."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brow, "This matter can only be made known to Lu Buwei, otherwise if the Qins find out about it, they may secretly give warning and that will be terrible."

Wu Yingyuan shook his head, "It's best that we keep this from Lu Buwei as well, then there won't be any accidents at all. Don't worry! We don't have to be so open and herd a few hundred warhorses out of Qin's borders, I'll just need a few days to settle everything. However we'll need to work on the route so that the Zhaos will really think that you are going to Handan from Chu."

Xiang Shaolong thought that all these are very exciting and interesting and after discussing the details, went back to his residence.

When he passed by Teng Yi's place, he suddenly heard the sounds of swords and was startled so he went in. After the maids pointed the way to him, he found Teng Yi at the small back garden and it turns out that this person and Shanlan were engaged in a lover's swordplay.

Teng Yi saw Xiang Shaolong and a sincere expression came onto his face.

After instructing Shanlan to practice with his subordinate, he pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and said happily, “Last night was really splendid. All the misery and pain these past few months have been resolved. Now I only hope that Shanlan will be able to give me a son so that I can keep my Teng family line going so that I don’t become the sinner responsible for destroying our Teng family line.”

Xiang Shaolong can’t help but laughed loudly and happily.

Teng Yi blushed and pretended to be furious, “If you laugh at me again, I’m going to get into a big fight with you.”

Xiang Shaolong laughed even harder.

Teng Yi only shook his head.

The next day Xiang Shaolong led his pretty wives and maids, together with the almost recovered Jing Jun and Teng Yi, Wu Zhuo and the team of Wu family’s most elite warriors and went back to that peaceful farm at the outskirts.

Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang were handling all the other arrangements for the trip to Zhao.

Xiang Shaolong concentrated on spending time with his wives and concubines and when there’s free time he’ll intensify the training of the Wu family’s ‘Special Task Force’ together with Teng Yi and the rest. Of course he did not forget to tell them all the background information they need to know

about their fake identities so that they will not slip up.

15 days later Tao Fang came to the farm and told them that everything is ready.

In the large hall of the farm's main residence, everyone gathered together to listen to the latest news about Handan.

Tao Fang said, "Handan is suddenly getting very lively. For some unknown reason, Lord Longyang from Wei and Han's most influential official, the Marquis of Pingshan, Han Chuang have all gone to Handan. There must be something going on and it seems that the special envoy from Qi will be going there shortly as well. The situation is extremely interesting."

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi turned to look at each other, both thought of a very serious problem.

Tao Fang's experience came with age and he has already thought of what the problem is and said with a sigh, "If Chu sent an envoy to Handan over this secret which we still know nothing about, although it may not blow the cover off your fake identities, you won't be able to pretend to Zhao Mu that you are the Chus he engaged to steal 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual'."

Teng Yi gave a cold laugh and using his finger in place of a sword, made an action of killing. It must be known that Chu is the furthest away from the state of Zhao and if they are fast enough, it's very possible that they can intercept the Chu envoy before he reaches Zhao.

Wu Zhuo said with a smile, "Leave this to me. In any case we need to send

some people out to scout around first and to get into contact with Zhao Mu so that he can help smoothen our way to King Zhuangxiang and let the Zhaos open the city gates to welcome us.”

He turned towards Tao Fang and added, “Is Zhao Mu back on good terms with that muddleheaded king already?”

Tao Fang sighed, “King Xiaocheng is honestly a muddleheaded ruler. News leaked out from the palace that that shameless Zhao Mu knelt outside the palace gates for only half a night and he allowed him to see him and in no time at all they were stuck together like glue again.”

He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, “Zhao Ya is a born s.lut, now she is back to her true colors and is wildly engaged with many handsome men and has gone back to her previous wild lifestyle.”

Xiang Shaolong remained silent. Tao Fang deliberately talked about this to make him give up. Hai! This s.lut really needs to be taught a good lesson before his hatred can be appeased. Once he thought of that, he secretly wondered if he still has feelings for her, otherwise why would he feel such hatred on hearing this news?

Tao Fang furrowed his brows in deep thought, “What are they planning?”

Jing Jun replied, “Of course they’re going to deal with us Qins.”

Teng Yi was momentarily stunned, “Xiao Jun you are addressing yourself as a Qin so soon.”

Jing Jun asked with embarrassment, “Is it inappropriate?”

Tao Fang laughed, “How can it be inappropriate, your Brother Teng was just not used to it.”

Teng Yi shook his head with a wry smile and did not speak further.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that people of this era does not regard the country as strongly as their clan. Their thinking is a little like those who work in a big company in the 21st century. If they feel that there are no prospects and that they are capable, it’s very normal for them to change to another company to work.

He asked Tao Fang, “Has Lu Buwei’s power in Qin improved greatly?”

Tao Fang nodded his head in the affirmative and said calmly, “What Premier Lu lacks now is military contribution, but he dare not act rashly as he’s afraid that he will be at a losing end if the Qins refuse to cooperate, then whatever little advantages that he has gained through you would have gone down the drain.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing sardonically. He’s afraid it would be difficult for him to help in this aspect. Although during this warring states period, others will attack you even if you don’t attack them but to ask him to lead an army to attack and take over cities, kill and set fire, he can never have the heart to do such things.

They discussed the mission again and decided that Wu Zhuo will set off

immediately the next day to stop the Chu envoy from reaching Zhao before they returned to their residences.

Before he could step through the door, he heard Zhao Qian's voice in the hall lamenting, "Hai! My monthly cycle is here again!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked still outside the door.

Wu Tingfang's voice replied, "It's getting on my nerves. I'm been taking tonics constantly but I'm still not pregnant."

Xiang Shaolong started to feel uneasy. Could something radioactive caused harm to his ability in this area when he came on the time machine? To the ladies, especially in this era where carrying on the family line is important, this will complete their happy family life but to him he does not think that it's really important at all.

The hall remained silent.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and sighed, and walked in.

20 days later, after Jing Jun has fully recovered, all of them set off secretly immediately and left the Qin border and after traveling one huge round, entered Zhao through the state of Qi.

Xiang Shaolong's planning is even more detailed than the past. He first sent out an envoy to hand over the formal document requesting to call on the King of Zhao over to the border guards. In a short while the bell on the watch

tower of the Zhao army rang and the drawbridge was lowered and a few hundred Zhao soldiers rode out uniformly to welcome them.

Teng Yi gave an order and the 300 Wu family's 'elite troops', who are now disguised as teams of herdsman, stood outside the army camp to await the arrival of the Zhaos.

The leader of the Zhao soldiers who led the troops is Zhai Bian, about 30 years old, short and stout with an intelligent face and warm personality. He chortled with laughter once he saw them, "Mister Dong's name is astounding indeed and now that I've seen you, you're even better than what your reputation expounds you to be."

After going through civilities, Xiang Shaolong, with the accompaniment of Teng Yi and Jing Jun, led him to view the 1000 handsome horses they brought with them.

As a warrior, Zhai Bian naturally knows his stuff and as he was viewing the horses, he exclaimed in surprise, "The quality of this batch of warhorses is even better than the horses the Wu family used to rear."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this hilarious and after expressing their modesty, he asked his man to take out an especially tall and handsome horse to give to Zhai Bian.

Naturally Zhai Bian's attitude became even warmer and he hurriedly opened the city gates wide and invited the team in grandly, saying as they moved along, "His Majesty is extremely happy to learn that Mister Dong is coming

afar from Chu, especially now that our country is in dire need of warhorses, Mister has really come at the right time.”

Xiang Shaolong and Teng, Jing exchanged looks, knowing that Wu Zhuo has accomplished his mission and has made vital contact with Zhao Mu.

That night Zhai Bian set up a feast to welcome them and during the feast asked them about the situation in Chu. They answered him with the stories that they have earlier agreed upon and both the host and guests enjoyed themselves.

The next morning Zhai Bian sent a commander to lead them towards Handan. They traveled during the day and rested at night and 20 days later, Xiang Shaolong finally returned to this great city that once brought him great sadness.

Chapter 9

Return to Handan

Handan still looked as good.

Here to welcome them was their 'old friend' Bureaucrat Guo Kai, and also Wu Zhuo who has now changed his name to 'Di Ying'.

After a round of civilities and polite talk, all of them, together with the thousand warhorses, rode grandly into this ancient city which is the center of the Zhao's power.

Guo Kai rode next to Xiang Shaolong and said with a smile, "His Majesty is extremely impressed that Mister still thinks of your old country even though you're in Chu. He has specially set up a feast to welcome Mister tonight."

Xiang Shaolong was looking at the city scene with mixed feelings and on hearing that, he deepened his voice to make it sound hoarse, slowed his tempo and said, "I am really touched that his Majesty understands my intention. Hai! A person who has lost his country is like duckweed without roots. The pain is not something an outsider can understand."

Guo Kai turned slightly towards him and said, "I heard from Mister Di from your residence that Mister Dong intends to come back display your capabilities but I don't know if you're aware of the situation?"

Xiang Shaolong had an idea and he pretended to be obtuse yet sincere as he replied, "I only know how to rear horses and nothing else so I hope that Bureaucrat Guo can give me some advices and I will never forget your kindness."

Their strategy for this trip is to pretend to be stupid and ignorant to handle sly characters like Guo Kai.

Guo Kai chortled before he turned serious and said with a low voice, "I don't know why but once I saw you, I feel very happy. I wouldn't dare give advices but I will certainly try my best to help you fulfill your dreams."

Xiang Shaolong put on a show of extreme gratitude and said, "With Bureaucrat looking after me like this, I am much relieved. I wonder if there's anything I should take note of?"

Guo Kai replied very sincerely, "Over at his Majesty's side, I will help you with the affairs. But there are 2 people in Handan that you must be on your guard against, otherwise not only will you find your dreams difficult to fulfill, you may even end up in trouble and meet the same fate as Master Wu."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be extremely startled as he stared and stammered his reply, "I have no enmity with anyone at all, why would anyone want to harm me?"

However he was secretly laughing in his heart.

Guo Kai obviously think of him as a ignorant, brash man with a simple mind,

that's why he used such a direct method to try and pull him over to his side so that he will be faithful and allow himself to be used.

From this he can tell that the King of Zhao intends to use him to replace Master Wu, that's why Guo Kai thinks that he is of value and worthy to be bought over.

Guo Kai's bright and sleazy eyes first scanned the surroundings and saw that the Zhao soldiers who are leading the way in front and Wu Zhuo and the rest who were behind are a 'safe' distance away before he lowered his voice to say, "The first person you have to be wary of is Guo Zhong. This person will now allow the appearance of another Master Wu."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head to indicate his understanding.

Guo Kai's words are not unreasonable; this is called 'a mountain cannot have two tigers'. But if he, 'Dong Kuang' wants to have as much wealth and power as what Master Wu had, it would take at least a few generations to accomplish it. Therefore Guo Kai is trying to scare him.

Guo Kai continued mysteriously, "The other person you have to be careful of is the Marquis of Julu, Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but exclaim hoarsely, "What?"

At that instant he understood that Guo Kai is unhappy to be under Zhao Mu and is looking for ways to topple him. But the way Guo Kai is revealing his inner thoughts to an outsider like him is really too careless and he can't help

but feel suspicious.

Right then they arrived at the guesthouse that will be used to house them and surprisingly it turns out to be the Hostage Residence which used to be Zhu Ji and the fake Ying Zheng's prison.

Guo Kai smiled and did not continue talking as he accompanied them into the residence.

Guo Kai went through another round of nice talks and after accepting this valuable gift of 1000 fine horses that the Zhaos find themselves unable to reject, he went back to the Palace to report his duty done.

All of them went to the inner hall to listen to Wu Zhuo's report.

Wu Zhuo exhaled as he said, "We were indeed lucky, the Chus really sent an envoy and luckily I manage to waylay him and got a lot of useful information."

Teng Yi replied with understanding, "Eldest Brother, it has been hard on you!"

Among these 5 sworn brothers, Wu Zhuo is the oldest so he became the Eldest Brother, followed by Teng Yi, Xiang Shaolong, Wang Jian and the youngest brother Jing Jun.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head and said, "It was indeed difficult. Although we set up traps when capturing the Chu envoy, we still lost 5 of our brothers and

more than 10 others were injured, but this is something unavoidable.”

Xiang Shaolong can imagine the danger and intensity at that time and asked, “Have you found out why they are coming to Handan?”

Wu Zhuo replied, “4th Brother’s way of tiring them out through questioning is really effective. That Chu envoy called Bai Dingnian could not hold on beyond 3 days and totally surrendered. He revealed the truth, it turns out that this matter involves Lord Dongzhou.”

Everyone was excited.

Ever since King Wu created his empire 700 hundred years ago and used Duke Zhou’s feudal system model, maybe this can be described as a large family where generations after generations live together.

This big family is first led by a smart and hardworking founder and leading his few sons, worked hard together in adversity and creating a big patriarchal clan. The ruler and the various lords of differing surnames are usually connected through marriages.

The whole system of a feudal state is centralized around the family clan.

Just by deducing from this, one will know that it’s only a matter of time that this empire will fall. The danger comes from 2 sides. Firstly the rule that the eldest son would succeed and once the successor is not the eldest, then there will be upheaval and King You of Zhou is the most obvious example.

Secondly, the original close relationships are slowly getting distant after a few generations and with the increase in population and the differences in the good and the bad, there will most certainly be some struggles or enmities formed and may even reach the state of a fight.

Once chaos ensued, no one will have the power to stop the natural turning of history's wheel. Once the royal family loses the power to control the lords, they will immediately fall into the situation where the country is divided into rival baronies.

And the invasion by others have forced King Ping of Zhou to move east and this provided such an opportunity.

The status between a ruler and his followers are initially forged by power and when this power disappears, the status becomes just an empty title and the Zhou family's power totally disintegrated.

But such a crack appeared slowly, and it's not a sudden break.

Before the 3 states were separated, there were still some old relations left between the lords and the Zhou family so they were not overly defiant.

That's why for 300 years after King Ping moved to the east, respect and deference are still generally accorded to the Zhou family.

After the 3 states were separated, there was still no situation where those not from the royal family oversteps his authority and tried to usurp the position. But the authority of the Zhou family was further weakened and

their power reduced. However Lord Dongzhou is still the leader of the lords in name.

Now Lord Dongzhou is making use of everyone's fear towards Qin to launch a last fight and indeed this is something that cannot be brushed off easily.

Wu Zhuo continued, "The secret envoy Lord Dongzhou sent is called Ji Zhong. If he manages to get the alliance of the 6 states: Qi, Chu, Yan, Zhao, Wei and Han, Qin will be faced with extremely dire situation and now it seems that chances of success is quite high."

Teng Yi looked at Xiang Shaolong and said, "We must try and sabotage this matter, otherwise it'll be difficult for Lu Buwei to keep his position as Premier."

Xiang Shaolong immediately felt his head getting heavier.

Teng Yi's words are very reasonable. After all Lu Buwei got his position as Premier because of King Zhuangxiang and it's not stable yet. And the Qins place the most emphasis on military contributions so if the 6 states join forces, they will certainly lose this war and by then even King Zhuangxiang won't be able to protect Lu Buwei.

If Lu Buwei falls, the Wu family can forget about staying in Qin. The world may be huge but there will be no place where the Wu family can live in peace.

An originally simple matter has now become something complicated and

troublesome.

Jing Jun finally found an opportunity to interrupt and said, "Isn't Yan and Zhao at war? Why would the Yans be involved this time as well?"

Teng Yi replied, "For these few centuries haven't the lords been fighting and making up again all the time?" He continued seriously, "Xiao Jun you'd better try to contain your impatience, don't go looking for your Zhao Zhi before the situation is cleared. Otherwise if you reveal your disguise, all of us can forget about leaving Handan alive."

Jing Jun looked crestfallen as he nodded his head in agreement but everyone can see how unwilling he felt.

Xiang Shaolong asked, "How's the situation like over at Zhao Mu's?"

There seems to be some remnants of fear as Wu Zhuo replied, "Luckily we caught the envoy sent by the Chus, otherwise we'll definitely be greatly disadvantaged. It turns out that Zhao mU is the 5th son of Chu's Lord Chunshen and this Chu envoy Bai Dingnian is sent by Lord Chunshen to make contact with Zhao Mu. He even brought with him Lord Chunshen's secret letter that he wrote personally and this saves me a lot of trouble trying to question him."

Teng Yi said with a laugh, "And of course Eldest Brother won't give it to that conniving thief without changing a single word on that letter!"

Wu Zhuo replied with a smile, "That's of course. The contents of the secret

letter is simple, only telling Zhao Mu to trust Bai Dingnian and cooperate with him well. As for what to cooperate about, it was not written. Therefore I copied the seal on the letter and wrote another letter to give to Zhao Mu. Now it seems that he totally trusts us.”

Xiang Shaolong had an idea as he asked, “Is that secret letter still around?”

Wu Zhuo replied, “How can I lose such a useful thing, I even kept that Chu envoy and he’s being imprisoned in a secret place in Handan. Zhao Mu is in trouble this time.”

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and after the 4 brothers had some further discussion, he recollected his thoughts and went to the Zhao Palace for the feast.

Along the way Xiang Shaolong remembered the time he went to the Zhao Palace for his duel with Lian Jin and feelings arose in him.

How everything in the world is so unpredictable, just like this.

Who would have thought at that time that on this day, 2 years later, he would come to see the King of Zhao in another identity and a totally different feeling?

Under the guidance of the Zhao soldiers, Xiang Shaolong and his 3 sworn brothers proudly rode past the Palace gates.

The imperial guards were posed to welcome them at the square in front of

the main palace building and with the drums beating, it was a very lively atmosphere.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest did not expect such a huge welcome and were all surprised. Now they know that the King of Zhao places much importance on their 'return'.

One of the military officers rode out on his horse and cried out loudly complimentary and welcoming phrases and surprisingly it's their old friend, that ungrateful Cheng Xu.

That fellow's army uniform has changed and it seems like he has been promoted a rank and has become the head of the imperial guards.

Xiang Shaolong followed civilities and after making some empty polite talk, rode with him towards the Palace.

Cheng Xu said with a warm smile, "I don't know why, although it's the first time I've met you, I feel like we're old friends. Oh! Mister feels like sometime I'm very familiar with but I can't remember who that person is right now."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and knows that although he has changed his looks, but his build remains the same and he might subconsciously reveal some loopholes through his mannerisms and actions, that's why it stirred up Cheng Hu's memories and feel of him.

He replied nonchalantly with his 'low, hoarse and slow' voice, "Officer Cheng need not think this is weird, I've often had this feeling as well, to see

someone for the first time and yet feels we've already known each other for a long time."

Cheng Xu seems enlightened and replied, "Seems like that's the case!"

By now they have reached the square in front of the Jade Hall at the inner Palace and Cheng Xu dismounted first followed by Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi and the rest.

More than 10 imperial guards were lined up on each side of the Jade Hall, standing in attention with their halberds. That conniving thief Zhao Mu, with the accompaniment of Le Cheng and Guo Kai, walked down to welcome them.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest sighed in their hearts on seeing this. To think that even after they have given King Xiaocheng such a severe lesson, he still relies on Zhao Mu so much.

Zhao Mu started chuckling from afar as he said, "I am the Marquis of Julu, Zhao Mu! Mister Dong has arrived just in time, his majesty is getting anxious from the wait."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be terrified as he replied respectfully, "If I've made his Majesty anxious, how can I ever answer for it."

Zhao Mu came forward, extended his hands to grasped his and said with a smile after making an eye signal at him, "His Majesty has personally seen the warhorses that you've sent and is very satisfied. With your help, us Great

Zhao will certainly be able to show off our military prowess.”

Xiang Shaolong saw that Zhao Mu did not recognize him and was relieved as he answered happily, “As long as I can make his Majesty happy, then this trip is not a wasted one.” At the same time he exchanged a look with Guo Kai.

Zhao Mu personally introduced him to Le Cheng while Xiang Shaolong introduced them to Teng and Jing. After a round of polite greetings, all of them went towards the Zhao Palace in a relaxed mood.

They have just stepped pass the Palace doors when the imperial guards in the hall immediately snapped neatly into attention and the band started a welcome melody.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest as well as Zhao Mu and his men knelt in front of the dais.

The King of Zhao chortled and left his dragon throne that was placed on the other end facing the main door and walked down the steps hurriedly to help Xiang Shaolong up and said warmly, “Mister Dong is my esteemed guest, there’s no need to be subservient.” He turned towards Teng Yi and the rest and said, “Everyone, please rise!”

Xiang Shaolong had just stood up when Jing Jun who was behind suddenly bawled and everyone, including Xiang Shaolong and his men were all stunned.

When everyone’s eyes were centered on Jing Jun who has lowered his head

and crying bitterly and lying on the ground, refusing to get up, that lad blubbered, “I lost myself, but to see that Young Master can now finally return to his homeland and fulfilled this wish that he has been thinking of for so many years, I’m so overcome that...” and he started crying again.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were secretly impressed, they did not expect that Jing Jun would have the ability to cry on demand. If not for the fact that they all know in their hearts what is happening, they would really think that he is so touched that he can’t help but cry.

Naturally the King of Zhao would not be suspicious at all as he walked over to help Jing Jun up and after consoling him, he turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, “I am extremely touched that Mister Dong has such a loyal servant.”

Only now did Xiang Shaolong has the time to take note of the surroundings inside the hall.

The Empress of Zhao Han Jing has also attended the feast and is seated on the right slightly behind King Xiaocheng and her eyes are boring into him. Luckily from her expression she seemed only curious and not because she has seen any loopholes.

On the bottom of both sides of the King of Zhao’s table there were another 4 tables. It’s meant to be a table for each person, which means there’s an empty table left. He wondered who is the person who is putting on such airs, to even have the audacity to be late at the King of Zhao’s feast?

He replied earnestly, "Although I have been overseas for a long period of time, but I have been constantly thinking of returning but because of Master Wu, I was afraid..."

The King of Zhao gave a cold snort and interrupted him, "Don't mention this person again. Don't worry! It's great that Mister keeps old relations in mind. From today onwards, just help me rear horses well and I will not treat you badly."

Xiang Shaolong and the rest hurriedly knelt and expressed their thanks and gratitude.

Just as they were about to be seated, the official at the door cried out, "Lady Ya arrives!"

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were all startled and they all turned to look towards the main door.

Other than a little more trace of weariness, Zhao Ya still looked radiant and outstanding, wearing a grand evening gown with blue flowers embroidered on a white base, like a colorful butterfly flying into the hall.

Xiang Shaolong thought of their old love and can't help but feel secretly sad.

When Zhao Ya's pretty eyes flitted over to where Xiang Shaolong was, her body obviously shivered a little and she held her step.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest were all secretly alarmed.

Zhao Ya is not like Zhao Mu or King Xiaocheng, she can feel what others cannot just based on her woman's sharp intuition towards love and intuition to a man whom she has been intimate with almost daily.

Luckily King Xiaocheng and Empress Jing both thought that this wanton woman has taken a liking to Xiang Shaolong, which accounted for her strange expression so they laughed and said, "Imperial Sister is late again, I must punish you by making you drink 3 cups of wine later. Aren't you coming over to meet Mister Dong!"

Zhao Ya recollected her thoughts and after giving a suspicious look at Xiang Shaolong, her pretty eyes suddenly dimmed as she moved towards the King of Zhao and knelt in respect before standing up and turned towards Xiang Shaolong to pay her respects and said, "Zhao Ya pays her respects to Mister Dong."

Xiang Shaolong and the rest heaved a sigh of relief and took the opportunity to be seated as well.

With Xiang Shaolong as the head, they took the 4 tables on the right. On the other side was Zhao Mu, Xhao Ya, Le Cheng and Guo Kai.

When the serving maids brought the dishes in, a group of 30 odd dancers ran in and started dancing with the accompaniment of drums.

Zhao Ya kept her pretty head lowered ever since she sat down, her expression sad. It looks as if her feelings have been roused and she was secretly wallowing in pity.

After the dance the host and guests offered toasts to one another.

However Zhao Mu would not let Zhao Ya off and reminded everyone of her punishment and forced her to down 3 cups of wine.

The slightly tipsy Zhao Ya began to loosen up and kept smiling coquettishly and flirting and although Xiang Shaolong was fuming on seeing this, but she did make the feast more lively and enjoyable. Once this beauty starts flirting, not a single man will be able to control his itch on seeing her. Especially now that she has reverted to her old wanton ways and was throwing looks at everyone there. Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo are better off but Jing Jun's head is already clouded as he kept on exchanging toasts with her.

After a while, the King of Zhao turned towards Xiang Shaolong and asked, "When does Mister intend to start your grand business here?"

Xiang Shaolong's hoarse voice said slowly, "I just made a trip here first, there's still a few war horses and stud horses who are being transported here now. There shall be no delay, I will go out the city tomorrow to explore and see if there are any suitable sites to set up a farm."

The King of Zhao said joyously, "That's the best!"

Zhao Ya threw a glance at Xiang Shaolong and said, "Is Mister's family arriving at the same time as well?"

Xiang Shaolong saw how immodest she was and was secretly displeased as he replied icily, "Once everything has been settled, I will send my men back

to bring them here.”

Le Cheng asked curiously, “The way that Mister Dong is moving your whole family over to our country, aren’t you afraid that will incur the Chu’s wrath?”

Xiang Shaolong replied calmly, “My farm is situated at the borders of Chu and Wei and as long as I send 500 warhorses and 500 livestock to the Chus every year, they will never interfere in my affairs. I have long made arrangements for my trip here this time and they won’t find out anything for the time being.”

The King of Zhao chortled as he said, “Let’s not talk business tonight and just talk about entertainment. Come! I’ll let Mister see something good.”

He clapped his hands and music started again.

While everyone opened their eyes wide, 4 dance courtesans flitted towards the tables and started another round of song and dance.

Not only did their beauty far surpass the dancers earlier, what is even more heart stopping is that their alluring bodies are each only clad in purple, red, bright yellow and light blue translucent gauze as they held long swords and danced. Their youthful and appealing bodies were exposed once in a while through the flimsy outfit as they danced, looking absolutely beautiful. Especially when their gentle bodies were paired with the steely swords, the 2 extremities increased their wildness.

Xiang Shaolong, who has not touched a woman since he started his journey,

can't help but feel his lust ignite on seeing this.

After the courtesans retreated, Zhao Mu said with a smile, "These are the best among the 10 Yan beauties that the Yan gave to his Majesty, and they are also the welcome gifts that his Majesty is giving to Mister. Do you think they're still acceptable?"

It is the norm for the powerful in this era to seal relationships by giving away beauties but it's not appropriate for Xiang Shaolong to accept the gifts given his current situation so he said with a straight face, "I appreciate his Majesty's kind intentions but there are a lot of things to look into right now regarding the opening of the farm and it's really not good to have female distractions. I would ask that your Majesty retract your order."

The King of Zhao was stunned for a moment before he replied, touched, "Mister is indeed an extraordinary man, no wonder you have the reputation of being a horse fanatic. Since that is the case, I will keep these 4 Yan ladies in the palace and will send them to your residence once everything has been settled."

Zhao Ya eyed Xiang Shaolong with great interest as she asked, "I wonder if Mister has decided when to leave the city to explore?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she has gotten curious now that she saw how unmovable he can be over beauties and was secretly lamenting as he replied with furrowed brows, "I'll leave before dawn tomorrow, and hope that General Le Cheng can arrange for the city gates to be opened."

He guessed that now that Zhao Ya has returned to her old flirtatious and languid ways, there's no way that she will try to wake up that early, which is why he deliberately mentioned that.

As expected, Zhao Ya revealed a look of disappointment and did not say anything.

The feast continued and although it was said that they shall not talk business, but because Xiang Shaolong is pretending to be an unrefined man who only knows husbandry, the topics always revolves around this area.

When the King of Zhao asked about the situation in Chu, Xiang Shaolong already has his answer prepared and answered them easily.

The host and guests drank to their heart's content.

After the feast Zhao Mu used the excuse of sending Xiang Shaolong home and shared the same carriage as him and took the opportunity to have a secret discussion.

This is the second danger after Zhao Ya.

The carriage went out of the Palace gates.

Zhao Mu's expression immediately turned stony as he asked icily, "Who thought of the idea to actually give 1000 fine warhorses to the Zhaos?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly fuming this hilarious but replied calmly, "Of

course it's Lord Chunshen's idea."

Zhao Mu's expression turned dark as his gleaming eyes stared at Xiang Shaolong coldly as he asked, "Are you really that 'horse fanatic' Dong Kuang?"

Xiang Shaolong lowered his voice, "Of course not. The real horse fanatic did have the intention of returning to Zhao and has long been killed by his Highness and had his possessions confiscated. These thousand warhorses are only part of his property."

Zhao Mu commented with incomprehension, "I only asked you to send people here to get 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual' from Guo Zhong, why have you come to Handan with so much fanfare instead. If something happens, even I may become implicated."

Xiang Shaolong replied slowly, "This is Lord Chunshen's ingenious plan. Since the incident with the Wu family, the state of Zhao is badly affected. They strong on the outside but is actually crumbling inside and this may become advantageous for Qin, Wei and Qi. His Highness has seen this coming so he changed his strategy and hopes that Master can take the place of the King of Zhao. In that way, Great Chu would be able to take control of Zhao without wasting even a single soldier."

Zhao Mu's body shook as a joyous look flashed though his eyes and he asked hoarsely, "Father really has such a plan?"

Ever since he arrived in Zhao, his power has been growing day by day but he

has always felt himself in a dilemma.

Lord Chunshen's original plan was for him to control the Zhao King and use the Zhao to keep a rein on the Qins and spoil the secret plan to unify the 3 states. But man is not without feeling and after staying in Zhao for more than 10 years, Zhao Mu can't help but feel a sense of belonging in Zhao. But this is just useless thinking on his side for he is still under the control of the Chus even from so far away. If he harbors any other thoughts, the Chus can expose his identity at any time and that would be a very bad feeling indeed.

But if he can grab the position of the King of Zhao, that would be an entirely different situation.

Man will always aim high, and this is exactly Zhao Mu's dream.

Xiang Shaolong saw his expression and knows that he has struck a chord in his heart so he added, "How would I dare to lie to Master. The warriors who came with me this time are all topnotch fighters, and there'll be a few thousand others will enter Zhao later on the pretext of sending the animals over. As long as we can get rid of influential generals like Lian Po and Li Mu, the Kingdom of Zhao will fall into your hands easily."

Zhao Mu replied happily, "So this is the case. Let me go back and think about how we should proceed with this plan."

He reached out and clasped his shoulder, coming to his ear and whispered, "If I can really become the ruler of Zhao, I'll certainly make it worthy for Mister." Both of them exchanged looks and chortled at the same time.

Of course they are laughing for entirely different reasons.

After the returned to the grand ex-hostage residence, Teng Yi told Xiang Shaolong, “That s.lut is very interested in 3rd Brother, you’d better be careful.”

Jung Jun commented with envy, “3rd Brother can use another identity and tryst with her a few more times, wouldn’t that be thoroughly exciting?”

Before Xiang Shaolong has a chance to speak, Teng Yi reprimanded Jing Jun unhappily, “Your head is always filled with lustful thoughts, but doesn’t understand that lust can impede plans. That s.lut had a close relationship with your 3rd Brother in the past and if they have a physical relation again, she’ll definitely be able to burst Xiang Shaolong’s real identity just by gut feel. Just the scent alone won’t be able to escape her.”

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed and secretly on the alert. To tell the truth he is still quite interested in Zhao Ya’s body and won’t think of copulating with her as a undesirable task but he did not think of the possibility that Zhao Ya will be able to ‘sniff’ him out.

He said with a laugh, “Luckily I’m masquerading as a horse fanatic who only loves horses and not beauties, so it’s useless no matter how interested she is in me.”

After they discussed their plans for the next day, everyone went back to their rooms for the night.

After he went back to his room, Xiang Shaolong removed his mask and laid on the bed, his thoughts in a turmoil and unable to get to sleep.

The main reason is because of Zhao Ya.

This s.lut who has betrayed him twice obviously still has feelings for him, otherwise her memories of Xiang Shaolong would not have been ignited by a horse fanatic like him and made her interested.

An inexplicable sense of hatred welled up. Maybe it arose from her wanton behavior, or maybe it's purely the thought of revenge. Even he cannot tell the difference.

His looks after he put on the mask is certainly not handsome, the skin tone tanned from exposure to the sun but matched with the shape of his body it does exude a certain charisma right from the inside, especially his eyes whose shape has been changed still looked very energetic and captivating.

He then thought about the pretty and courageous Ji Yanran and with all these thoughts in his mind, all the more he could not get any sleep so he might as well get up and meditate according to the Mohist principles.

In a short while his body and spirit merged and when he opened his eyes the sky is slowly brightening.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly changed and after wearing his mask, went to the hall to meet up with Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo to leave together.

Jing Jun did not go with them because he had another task at hand.

Le Cheng sent a general called Xie Fa who led a troop of Zhao soldiers to be their guide and he was waiting for them in the main hall. After a round of civilities, everyone rode into the main street of Handan, where a new day is just beginning.

Hoof beats were heard behind them.

Everyone turned their heads around in surprise to see a team of horsemen coming after them and shockingly, it was Zhao Ya and 10 odd of her personal guards.

Xiang Shaolong exchanged looks with Teng and Wu but had no choice but to rein in their horses to wait.

No one expected Zhao Ya's 'interest' in Xiang Shaolong to be so huge.

The smiling Zhao Ya first sent off her personal guards, which includes Zhao Da and his men, before riding forward to Xiang Shaolong and said with a beam, "Mister Dong is a guest from afar, how can you not have a companion?"

Xiang Shaolong saw that she was dressed in a tight fitting light blue horse riding wear with a short skirt and long pants and long boots, openly showing off her alluring curves. He felt a rush of feelings and was at a loss for words.

Zhao Ya rolled her eyes at him and asked, "Mister Dong does not welcome me?"

Xiang Shaolong replied slowly in his hoarse voice, “Lady, you think too much. I’ll only be too delighted to have Lady accompany me!”

Zhao Ya sent out a tinkling peal of laughter as she urged her horse forward and said, “Then follow me!”

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly and followed her on his horse.

They left the city via the east gate and galloped.

Looking at the wild forests changing from Spring to Summer, Xiang Shaolong was in a euphoric mood as he threw away all his troubles. At the same time he has made up his mind to do one huge job here and create chaos among the Zhaos and this time he will not hold himself back because of a soft heart.

Chapter 10

Meeting on a narrow road

Zhao Ya rode her horse exuberantly and the rest of them had to chase after her. After passing through the large plain outside the city, Zhao Ya left the official path and rode towards the rolling hills at the northeast.

The landscape began to change as the grass changed into strange rocks and stones as they traveled along waterfalls and dangerous cliffs, with clouds and fog surrounding them, creating an extremely beautiful scene.

After passing through a mountain, they came to a valley with cliff walls reaching into the clouds on both sides and the clear sky is just a line in the horizon.

Zhao Ya slowed down in front and just as Xiang Shaolong was about to chase up with her, Teng Yi came alongside him and said quietly, “Shaolong! If you talk to Zhao Ya with that earlier expression and tone, she’ll find out sooner or later.”

Xiang Shaolong was extremely startled and knows that Teng Yi can see things more clearly as a bystander. He turned back to look and saw that Wu Zhuo has engaged Xie Fa into talking about the surroundings and won’t be able to hear their conversation so he quickly asked for advice.

Teng Yi replied, “Dong Kuang is famed for being someone who only knows

how to rear horses and is totally unrefined in other areas, so you can do as you deem fit!”

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened and became quiet.

They reached the end of the valley and the scene in front was refreshing with the trees pointing towards the sky and the rays of sunlight filtering through the layers of thick green leaves with rainbow hues, so indescribably beautiful.

Streams were crisscrossing amongst the trees and rocks, the sounds of the water crisp and clear and it feels as if they’ve come to a place that is not of this earth, intoxicating their senses.

Zhao Ya seems very familiar with this place and led them to a small hilltop and they could immediately see their surroundings.

Xiang Shaolong reined his horse as he came alongside Zhao Ya and looked around. He realized that where they are standing is the center of a huge plain and with unique looking cliffs in the distance. The grounds were deep green with abundant water and grass with a fragrance in the air and he can’t help but chortle, “D.amn his grandmother, how does Lady know of such a splendid place?”

Zhao Ya heard such coarse language from him and her delicate brows frowned but she did not answer him.

Teng Yi and the rest came to their side as well and they all expressed their agreement. Xie Fa said, “This place is called Hidden Army Valley and the only

entrance is the line in here earlier. When our Great Zhao's King Wuling was at war with Rong Di in the past, he had once hidden his army in here and won the battle. Since then this place was named Hidden Army Valley. Does Mister Dong think this place suitable?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly thinking to himself how would he know if it's suitable so he hurriedly made an eye at Wu Zhuo, the husbandry expert.

Wu Zhuo nodded his head slightly to indicate his agreement.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to look over the surroundings before he complimented with a sigh, "Ah! It's really d.amn f*king good!"

Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo were secretly feeling hilarious but to Xie Fa and Lady Ya the words were jarring on their ears.

Xiang Shaolong controlled his urge to laugh and said, "Once I see something good, I can't control myself but exclaim the words f*king a few times. This is such a wonderful place, isn't it even more f*king good?"

Xie Fa was overjoyed, "So does this mean that Mister is going to choose this valley as your farm?"

At this time Zhao Ya looked towards Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately stared hard at her perky bosoms before nodding, "Yup! I really like the looks of this place. From this day onwards, this Hidden Army Valley will be the place where I set up my first farm. Damn his

grandmother! I didn't expect to find a location so smoothly."

Zhao Ya saw the way he behaved and talked was extremely uncouth and thought that this is the real him and was secretly unhappy. She said coldly, "Since Mister Dong has found the ideal farm, can we go back now?"

Xiang Shaolong deliberately looked at her sleazily and said, "I still have to inspect the water source, soil and grass here carefully. Damn, why is Lady in such a hurry to go back?"

Zhao Ya was even more annoyed to hear how rude and foul-mouthed he was and replied with irritation, "I have other appointments, how would I have time to accompany Mister longer?"

She was secretly thinking that she must have been blinded because ever since she returned to her residence last night, she kept thinking of this person and could not sleep, which is why she came looking for him as soon as day broke. But this is good too, this person may have Xiang Shaolong's build, but his looks are a thousand miles apart so in this case, she can give up.

Ever since Xiang Shaolong, she no longer wishes to be entangled by feelings.

Xiang Shaolong thought he might as well go all the way and let Zhao Ya give up all hope on him so he asked with a strange smile, "I wonder who is the person who can make Lady in such a hurry to return?"

Zhao Ya could not tolerate it any longer and said angrily, "That is my business and has nothing to do with you at all." She pulled her horse's reins and

turned and galloped towards the plains.

Xie Fa was so shocked that he hurriedly sent half of his men to escort her back to the city.

Xiang Shaolong felt gleeful.

As long as he can hurt her, he'll feel a sense of happiness.

Although she still has some feelings left for him, but if she had succeeded in harming him the last time, he would be a pile of bones by now so between them there is no more relation to speak of.

After he made a pretense of surveying the place, they went back to their residences at dusk.

Zhao Mu's men are already waiting for him to invite him to the Marquis Residence for a feast.

After Xiang Shaolong bathed and changed, he went alone with them to the Marquis Residence for the feast.

Zhao Mu was overjoyed to see him come and as it's still early, he took him to the inner hall for a secret discussion. Before he started on the main point, he laughed and said, "I heard that you thoroughly infuriated Zhao Ya. Why? You're not interested in that s.lut at all? Now she is at a point where it's the easiest to hook up with."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing Zhao Mu and at the same time hating Zhao Ya for cheapening herself as he replied, "I was afraid she is King Xiaocheng's spy, how would I dare to dally with her?"

Zhao Mu was obviously very impressed with his sense of caution as he clapped his shoulder and said closely, "Who else would know better than me whether she's a spy? If you're interested in her, I can make arrangements for you."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting so he quickly changed the topic, "Has Marquis thought over that matter yet?"

Zhao Mu was immediately energetic and totally forgot about Zhao Ya as he said with a serious look, "Almost everyone in Handan now is my trusted aide, we just have to get rid of a few people and I will be able to sit on the King of Zhao's throne comfortably."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "The first 2 to be killed should be Lian Po and Li Mu!"

Zhao Mu complimented him, "With a talent like you helping me, need I fear my great career will fail? But there are a lot of formidable fighters around these 2, I'm afraid it'll be very difficult to strike."

Xiang Shaolong replied calmly, "If it's easy, you would have struck long ago. Leave this matter to me, as long as I can obtain accurate information on them, I'll certainly succeed with one strike. I heard that they are now not in Handan so it's best if there's a way to call them back, then I will ask my men

to set up a trap and get rid of them cleanly.”

Zhao Mu looked at him with suspicion, “You’re really that confident? The 2 of them have a few thousand personal guards, they’re not easy to deal with.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “No one is better than me at the art of assassination, please be assured.”

How could Zhao Mu possibly believe his one sided talk so he said somberly, “We need to plan this in detail. You better set up the farm first and lay your foundation. With me speaking on your behalf to King Xiaocheng, things will certainly run smoothly.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly finding this funny. He said those words to let Zhao Mu understand for himself that this thing cannot be rushed and now that his goal is reached, of course he’s not so stupid as to keep pushing it so he nodded his head and said respectfully, “I will listen wholly to your orders, this is also his Highness’s instructions.”

Zhao Mu saw that he was so obedient and was secretly glad and said with a smile, “King Xiaocheng now has a very good impression of you but remember that you must hurry up on the farm. Ha! This move of yours really struck the Zhao’s fatal point because they are most anxious to have a savior like you now.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “I have already chosen a place for the farm and will start on it immediately tomorrow.” Zhao Mu stood up and said, “Come! The others should have arrived, besides a few of the most influential people in

Handan, I have also invited the envoys from the various states who came because of Lord Dongzhou's matter. Make use of this opportunity to meet them!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has now become Zhao Mu's trusted confidante, that's why he is treating him so nicely so he stood up and followed him into the main building of the Marquis residence.

The two of them strolled past the corridors side by side and all the servants and maids knelt down to pay their respects on seeing them.

When they walked past the big garden which was right in the middle of the Marquis residence, a group of about 100 dance courtesans were practicing dancing. For a moment the mixture of fragrance, clothes, hair, and dainty voices can make one overwhelmed.

Xiang Shaolong has sharp eyes and was surprised to find that the teacher who was directing their dance is actually Zhao Zhi and he can't help but looked at her in shock.

The training did not stop because Zhao Mu is passing by. Zhao Zhi obviously saw Zhao Mu but pretended not to notice him and kept on giving out orders to make the pretty dancers dance. The colorful costumes dazzle under the illumination of the lanterns.

Zhao Mu whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ears, "Taken a liking to her? That girl is called Zhao Zhi, her father is a learned scholar in Zhao and her Teacher is an expert in swordplay, there's nothing I can do to her too."

Xiang Shaolong just shrugged his shoulders and continued walking.

After passing the garden, they reached the long corridor that will lead them directly to the main building and it seems to be suddenly quite in comparison. A maid came towards them and on seeing Zhao Mu hurriedly moved aside and knelt down.

Right at this time, Xiang Shaolong instinctively felt alert and reflexively placed his right hand on the pommel of Blood Wave.

He was feeling perplexed and can't help but take a look at that maid only to see her hand reaching into her wide sleeve, her head lowered and her kneeling posture was very unique, giving one a strange feeling, as if she can spring up at any moment and execute several kinds of movement.

All these are just instinctive feelings. If not for the fact that Xiang Shaolong has been meditating according to the Mohist principle every night since his journey to Handan, his feelings would not have become so sharp.

Zhao Mu felt nothing amiss at all and continued walking.

Xiang Shaolong was in a dilemma. If this girl is here to assassinate Zhao Mu, then she is on the same side as him but now he has to protect Zhao Mu because not only does he have to capture him alive to bring to Qin, he has to make use of him in his plan to kill Le Cheng and to find out the plot involving the envoy sent by Lord Dongzhou. But if he causes this girl to be captured by Zhao Mu, how can he put his heart at ease.

But now is not the time to think further, for they are now only 10 steps away from the maid.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly moved from the outside to stand between Zhao Mu and the maid, hoping that this will make her retreat.

Zhao Mu became alert and looked at Xiang Shaolong.

The maid suddenly lifted her head to reveal a pretty yet strong face, her pretty eyes burning with hatred and at the same time her hands extended from inside the sleeves and as she flicked them, 2 beams of white flashed towards Zhao Mu like lightning.

Zhao Mu was caught unawares and thoroughly startled and before he had a chance to exclaim or dodge, Xiang Shaolong has already drawn out Blood Wave and waved it twice with lightning speed, accurately blocking the 2 flying daggers.

The female assassin apparently did not have a third dagger and with a sharp scream, dashed past them out of the corridor.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to give chase and suddenly a dark shadow appeared in front of his eyes and it turns out to be the whip from the female assassin's hand.

He took the opportunity to retreat towards Zhao Mu, as if protecting him but in fact he's trying to block the path of Zhao Mu who has already drawn his sword.

The female assassin knows that she has missed her chance and rolled into the bushes without stopping and disappeared into the night.

Zhao Mu nearly collided into Xiang Shaolong and hurriedly raised his hand to grab his shoulder to brake himself.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the 2 daggers which has fallen to the ground and the blades shone a faint blue reflection under the light and it's obvious that it has been dipped in poison.

Zhao Mu was still a little fearful as he said, "Luckily you are here this time, otherwise my life would be gone. Humph! All those people are idiots, not even knowing that an assassin has snuck in."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling glad for now he can gain even more trust from Zhao Mu and on the other hand allow the female assassin to escape safely.

This is not the first time he saw this highly skilled female assassin.

At that time when he took Zhao Mu's carriage and left the Marquis residence, this female assassin mistook him for Zhao Mu and threw the poisonous snake into the carriage to assassinate him.

He wonders what is the great enmity between her and that thief Zhao Mu that she has to keep trying for his life and on both occasions she failed because of him.

But then again Zhao Mu has committed so much evil that it's inevitable that he has enemies all over the place.

The feast was held in the wide main hall of the Marquis residence and there were about 40 odd 'double seated' tables to seat 2 people each that filled the entire hall.

By now Xiang Shaolong already has some experience with the feasts given during this era. When he saw this he was shocked for never in his dreams did he imagine that tonight's feast would be so grand and with so many attendees.

When a ruler holds a feast for his officials and guests, it will definitely be 'single seated' where there's one person per table if there are less people and if there are grand feasts with over a hundred people, it will tables will be placed on the front and back rows with 'multiple seats' for 4 or more people.

As for the feasts held by most senior officials or influential people, they are mostly 'double seated'.

When the both of them arrived at the hall, there was still some time before the feast starts so only Zhao Mu's trusted aide Le Cheng and the cunning Guo Kai was around. These 2 are very close to Zhao Mu so they came earlier to help entertain the guests.

Zhao Mu made some small talk and disappeared, naturally he has gone to reprimand his men for their failure to protect the residence and it seems that someone will surely be in trouble.

Le Cheng and Guo Kai came up to Xiang Shaolong and started chatting with him warmly. They first asked about the chosen location for the farm before Le Cheng sighed and said, "I'm really in a difficult position this time. Everyone who thinks that they are someone in Handan are all fighting to attend tonight's feast but there's a limit to the seating. Hai..."

Guo Kai added with a wry smile, "I've met with the same problem as well and I can only push the responsibility to the Marquis and tell them to ask the Marquis directly why they are not on the list of invites."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely surprised for he thinks that he does not have the charisma to attract others that much so he asked with a furrowed brow, "Why are there so many people here for the feast tonight?"

Le Cheng asked quizzically, "Didn't Marquis tell Mister? The Learned Lady whose reputation is on par with Qin's Widow Qin, Ji Yanran is in Handan as a guest. His Marquis was not sure initially that he can invite her here but it turned out that she agreed without hesitation, that's why everyone wants to come here to take a look at her glory."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and hot blood rushed in his veins and for a moment, he couldn't speak.

Thank heavens! This rare beauty is finally here.

Guo Kai looked at him in surprise as he said, "Ha! I did not expect that Mister Dong is also another 'fan of the Learned Lady'."

Xiang Shaolong's attention is now all on Ji Yanran so how can he possibly be interested in talking nonsense with them. He made up an excuse and went out to the gardens from the side door in order to calm his excited nerves.

When he thought of how he can be reunited with his ideal beauty, he felt as if he's like a fairy floating amongst the clouds.

No matter what he must sleep with her tonight.

At the same time he was secretly puzzled. Why did she agree to attend the feast knowing very well that Zhao Mu is his greatest enemy?

Hurried footsteps sounded behind him.

Xiang Shaolong turned around suddenly in surprise and came face to face with a gorgeous beauty.

The beauty was startled and hurriedly took 2 steps back, her pretty face paled and her joy turned into disappointment as she lowered her head and said sadly, "Sorry! I mistook you for the wrong person."

From the faint light from the lantern a distance away, this person turned out to be the elder sister of the twin sisters who once slept with him, the Yue beauty Tian Zhen.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood. She must have walked past this place, saw his back view and recognized him as Xiang Shaolong but when she saw his disguise as Dong Kuang she was greatly disappointed.

From this he can see how deep and unforgettable is his impression on her. He felt sorry for her and said gently, "Never mind! What is your name?"

Tian Zhen's delicate body trembled as she covered her mouth and exclaimed, "You're really Master Xiang, I will remember your unforgettable voice even in my dreams."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly covered in sweat, he did not expect that his identity would be revealed because he forgot to change his voice and he hurriedly replied in his coarse voice, "Miss, you are mistaken!"

Tian Zhen exclaimed with joy and fell into his arms, hugging him in a death grip as she said, "I will not forget you even if I died, we were so worried about you. We really have to thank the Gods that you are all right!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he cannot hide it from her so he carried her into the deep woods and kissed her thoroughly before whispering in her ears, "Now my real identity is still a big secret!"

Tian Zhen added obediently, "I understand, I will not reveal your identity even if I have to die."

Xiang Shaolong said even more seriously, "You cannot even tell your sister about this."

Tian Zhen hesitated for a moment before nodding her head dejectedly, "All right! But like me, she misses you terribly as well!"

Xiang Shaolong was a little at ease as he said quietly, “As long as you listen to me obediently, I’ll definitely take both of you with me and will not go back on my words.”

Tian Zhen was so touched that tears gathered in her eyes and she kissed him thoroughly, her alluring body pressing against his.

Xiang Shaolong’s long suppressed lust was immediately flamed and he can only regret that this is not the appropriate time nor place. After being entangled for a while, the blushing Tian Zhen unwillingly walked back to the inner buildings after much persuasion from him.

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and smiled wryly before going back to the main hall.

He had just taken 2 steps when a pair of man and woman walked into the garden from the side door he used earlier. They were in a secret discussion and surprisingly it was Zhao Mu and Zhao Ya.

He had an idea and hid himself amongst some bushes and listened quietly.

Zhao Ya’s face was drawn tight as she said icily, “Don’t speak further, no way am I going to accompany that kind of coarse and unrefined brute. You have so many beauties on your hand, why don’t you give him some. For example your most beloved Tian sisters, won’t they satisfy him even more?”

Zhao Mu reached out and wrapped his arms around her tiny waist as he said with a sinister smile, “Or have you not forgotten Xiang Shaolong?”

Zhao Ya was stunned and replied angrily, “Don’t talk nonsense, who says I cannot forget him!”

Xiang Shaolong saw how intimate they were and heard Zhao Ya’s heartless words. Although he knows that she has no choice but to make such a stand, he still felt furious and thoughts of hatred and revenge surged in his head.

Zhao Mu extended his other hand and hugged her tightly, saying with a grin, “Naturally it’s best that you do not think of him. This time if the 6 states can successfully form an alliance, even Qin will not be able to escape her fate of being split up. By that time I want Xiang Shaolong to die without a burial place. I will whip his corpse even if he’s dead in order to appease the hatred in my heart.”

Zhao Ya replied icily, “Speak only if you really have that ability! Ai!”

Sounds of clothes rustling, obviously Zhao Mu was taking advantage of the close contact between their bodies to caress Zhao Ya’s sensitive spots.

Xiang Shaolong was livid on hearing this and secretly hated Zhao Ya for not knowing how to love herself and cheapening herself.

Her breathing quickened uncontrollably as she breathed, “Aren’t you going back to entertain the guests?”

Zhao Mu grinned lasciviously, “Don’t you want me to entertain you first?”

Zhao Ya’s dainty fists pounded weakly on his back as she cried out, “Let me

go!”

Zhao Mu replied, “Promise me that you will accompany Dong Kuang, then I will release you!”

Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood, so it turns out that Zhao Mu is trying to use Zhao Ya to get into his good books and the reason is of course he has not only saved his life, but also executed his extraordinary alertness and swordsmanship. He now looks at him differently and treasures him even more.

Zhao Mu is judging others by his own yardstick so naturally he thinks that power, women and wealth will be able to pull him onto his side and Zhao Ya is the best present he can think of for now.

Zhao Ya asked in bewilderment, “Why are you placing so much importance on that Dong Kuang?”

Zhao Mu gave a dry cough as he replied, “It’s not I who places much importance on him, but it’s your Imperial Brother’s order that it’s important that we treat this person well, don’t you understand?”

On hearing that it’s the King of Zhao’s idea, Zhao Ya softened a little as she said with a quiet voice, “Maybe he’s not interested in women? Otherwise why would he reject the courtesans that Imperial Brother bestowed on him last night.”

Zhao Mu sighed, “All real men are lecherous. I think his standards are just too

high and therefore not interested in those courtesans at all! But how can we compare our Lady Ya to them!”

Zhao Ya said icily, “Go after Ji Yanran if his standards are high then, who am I to compare?”

Xiang Shaolong could sense the bitterness in her tone and knows that she is jealous of Ji Yanran and can’t help but form a plan for revenge.

Zhao Mu sighed, “Ji Yanran is famous for being a stony maiden without feelings, how can she be compared to the gentle and feeling Zhao Ya. Don’t say anymore, I heard that Dong Kuang came out for a breather, help me get him to return! Why are you so nervous? It’s not as if I want you to bed him tonight.”

Zhao Ya remained silent.

Xiang Shaolong knows that there’s no point eavesdropping any further so he slowly slipped away.

Xiang Shaolong sat in the pavilion, looking at the starry sky as he heard Zhao Ya’s approaching footsteps.

He has changed his mind about Zhao Ya now and has decided to toy with her as punishment for her.

Zhao Ya came up behind him and forced herself to suppress her hatred towards him and said congenially, “Why is Mister Dong all alone here, almost

half the guests are already here!”

Xiang Shaolong replied in his hoarse voice, still looking at the sky as he said, “I’ve never liked crowds. Look! The sky is so enchanting, her relation to us is so close and it’s all due to the stars in her arms that we can plot our paths and know the time and seasons. After a person dies, he will return to the deepest part of her. It seems that she is protecting our lofty dreams, controlling the fate of everyone on this earth.”

Zhao Ya did not expect such an unrefined person to say such profound words and was momentarily stunned. She sat down on a rock behind him and for a moment was at a loss for words.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling melancholic as he sighed and added with a wry smile, shaking his head, “When I think that regardless of Mo Di or Kong Qiu, King Wu or Duke of Zhou, when they lifted their heads, they are seeing the same sky as well. How can we not feel the eternity of the sky when compared to man’s miniscule and short lives. A pity that most people still cannot forget about the fight for power, fighting tooth and nail for such shallow gains day and night. That’s why I’ve never liked fighting for power, only hoping to rear my precious horses in a carefree manner and just speak my mind! F*k that sky, I really love her a lot, that’s why I want to f*k her, the way I f*k my beloved woman.”

Although he cursed 3 times continuously, but this time Zhao Ya felt totally different on hearing it because he has given this 3 curse words a very profound feeling and meaning and it has become a totally different matter now.

Zhao Ya said in a quiet voice, "I have offended Mister today, my apologies."

Xiang Shaolong shrugged his shoulders graciously as he stood up and turned around, his burning eyes staring into her pretty face as he said with a smile, "It doesn't matter how Lady regards me, so how can there be a misunderstanding? Like this night sky, if you take only one look, maybe you'll not notice anything but if you look closely, we will see more and more stars the darker the night and every star will have her own story. Without a beginning, there will not be an end."

Zhao Ya has no defense against his stare so she lowered her head and said, "Mister's words are indeed touching!"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing for no one other than him knows how to touch this slut's heart. He stretched lazily and said, "All right! I should be returning to that mundane world. I only hope that time passes fast enough so that I can go home and sleep. Isn't the world in our dreams even more beautiful?"

Zhao Ya had a longing expression, hoping that he will continue talking. Suddenly, she felt that even if she has to sleep with him, it doesn't seem like a terrible task after all.

Besides, his masculine body made her think uncontrollably about Xiang Shaolong. Would it be as intoxicating to bed him as it was with Xiang Shaolong?

She really wants to know the answer!

Chapter 11

Unstoppable old flame

Zhao Mu chortled, “Please stop your flirtations for a moment. Come Marquis Chuang, let me introduce to you the world famous horse fanatic Mister Dong Kuang.”

Han Chuang’s gaze settled on Xiang Shaolong’s face, his expression aloof and after making do with some small talk, he pulled Zhao Ya aside and started whispering affectionately with her.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly feeling livid and hating himself for unable to forget this slut after all. Luckily the mask helped to conceal his real expression but he suddenly has less to talk about now.

Zhao Mu saw this and found an opportunity to pull him aside and said, “Just leave Zhao Ya to me, I’ll make sure you’ll have a chance to enjoy her. But I have a sincere warning for you, that woman is promiscuous so just have fun with her, don’t ever get serious.”

Xiang Shaolong knows that the misunderstanding is getting deeper so he hurriedly said, “Business is more important, I can live with or without such matters.”

How can Zhao Mu possibly believe him but before he has a chance to speak

further, the official at the door reported, “Lord Longyang from the State of Wei arrives!”

The hall was immediately quiet, obviously everyone was waiting to see this person and most have not seen this pretty man who is famous for his good looks.

There was a strange gleam in Zhao Mu’s eyes as he stared at the entrance.

The sounds of trinkets were heard as Lord Longyang strolled into the hall floatingly, dressed in colorful robes and accompanied by 4 to 5 swordsmen.

The hall immediately came abuzz with whisperings; the topic of conversation is naturally around this transgender male.

Zhao Mu tapped Xiang Shaolong’s shoulder and went forward.

Guo Kai came to Xiang Shaolong’s side and said with a low laugh, “Isn’t it extremely amazing that there is such a character in the world?”

Le Cheng also came to his other side and shook his head as he sighed, “His Marquis will be kept quite busy.”

Xiang Shaolong saw Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang chatting and laughing quietly and was secretly thinking it was eye opening and at the same time was on the alert. This Lord Longyang is especially interested and scrutinizing towards men and if he’s not careful, ‘he’ may find some loopholes and that would be terrible.

Zhao Ya's voice rang up from behind him, "What's the matter? Look at the way all of you are staring, were you unable to resist the lure of the men?"

Xiang Shaolong could not repress the repulsion he felt towards the way she was behaving intimately with the Marquis of Pingshan earlier so he just gave a cold snort and left.

Zhao Ya ran after him and said with a coquettish smile, "Why does Mister Dong look unhappy? Have I offended you?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Only now was he able to confirm that he still had some feelings left for this wanton woman, that's why he can't help but feel jealous and lost control of himself. He hurriedly recollected himself as he stopped walking to look at her, saying with a smile, "Lady you think too much, you have not done anything to make me unhappy so why would you say that?" At the same time he thought that Zhao Ya could have deliberately made use of Han Chuang to test his intentions towards her.

Zhao Ya glared at him and asked, "Then why is it that Mister Dong is avoiding me when I've only said one sentence?"

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's no way he can explain himself so he might as well not explain so he just replied nonchalantly, "I like to do whatever I like, and have never wasted my effort to think of the reason."

Under his stare, a sense of familiarity and confusion rose in Zhao Ya's heart and his natural manliness and intensity softened her heart as she sighed sadly and said, "You're really unfathomable. One moment you're gentler

than anyone else and the next you're cold and heartless, like now. It makes one wonder how to deal with you."

Right then Xiang Shaolong saw Zhao Zhi accompanying Zhao Ba into the hall, joining Zhao Mu's group. Zhao Mu waved him over to meet Lord Longyang. He smiled at Zhao Ya as he said, "There's enough people here to take Lady's attention, there's no need to waste your precious time on an unrefined person like me. Look! Marquis Pingshan is looking for you again."

Zhao Ya glanced towards where he was looking. Han Chuang had just ended his polite talk with Lord Longyang and is walking towards her and she was secretly irritated with Han Chuang for coming at the wrong time.

After she lost Xiang Shaolong, she has felt extreme sadness and emptiness, that's why she returned to her old lascivious lifestyle, hoping to use other men to numb and cheapen herself so that it will reduce her guilt and the pain of missing Xiang Shaolong.

But no one could replace Xiang Shaolong.

When this Han Chuang first arrived in Zhao, she was embroiled in a heated relationship with him and spent a short and happy time together. But she can't help but feel that this person cannot replace Xiang Shaolong so she slowly cooled off, needing another new and fresh excitement.

That's why when she met Dong Kuang whose physique 'closely resembles' Xiang Shaolong, it seems that she has found a new life. Although she was irritated by his unrefined behavior and words this morning, she cannot deny

that it gives her another feeling of excitement too. When Xiang Shaolong spoke such intoxicating words to her at the garden earlier, making her remember the heady time she once spent with Xiang Shaolong, her attention has already moved to this person.

The more Xiang Shaolong shows his manliness and imposing aura, the more she feels that this man is the personification of Xiang Shaolong and the more she is falling for him. Under such circumstances, Han Chuang has instead turned into an irritating obstacle.

As she was thinking, Han Chuang has already reached her.

Xiang Shaolong smiled suavely and bid his leave, walking towards Zhao Mu and Lord Longyang's group.

Zhao Zhi and Lord Longyang looked towards Xiang Shaolong at the same time.

Xiang Shaolong deliberately changed his style of walking, making it a swagger as he raised his hands in greeting and said in a coarse voice, "Dong Kuang pays his greetings to Lord Longyang!"

A look of surprise flashed past Lord Longyang's 'pretty eyes' as he replied, "I've long heard of Mister's great name, it's really fortunate that we get to meet today!"

Zhao Zhi's pretty eyes were wide open, staring intently at him.

Zhao Mu chortled as he introduced Zhao Ba and a few senior officials of Zhao to Xiang Shaolong.

Lord Longyang ‘smiled coquettishly’, “Mister is indeed a great man of our times, no wonder you’re making us girls all stare at you!”

Zhao Zhi’s pretty face blushed before she realized that she has behaved irregularly because this person closely resembles Xiang Shaolong. She lowered her pretty face and stared angrily at Lord Longyang.

Xiang Shaolong felt his goose pimples rising under the eyes of Lord Longyang and prayed that he has not taken a liking to him.

Zhao Ba chortled as he said, “Lord Longyanf and Mister Dong are both expert swordsmen, why don’t we find a day to exchange pointers at my school. Wouldn’t that be a grand event in the martial arts realm?”

Lord Longyang’s glittery eyes surveyed the hall before he said with a smile, “If we can manage to invite our Learned Lady Ji to the school as well, maybe everyone here will go there to partake in the atmosphere. Now that would really be a grand event!”

Everyone laughed together with him.

Zhao Zhi can’t help but to steal another look at Xiang Shaolong, her expression strange.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, he guessed that Jing Jun could have

leaked some news, otherwise Zhao Zhi's expression wouldn't have looked so strange.

Right at this time, the door official deliberately raised his voice as he sang out, "Miss Ji Yanran arrives!"

The noisy atmosphere in the hall immediately ceased and everyone, men and women, all looked towards the main door.

Xiang Shaolong's heart began beating faster.

Will this pretty lady whom he has not seen for so long still look as wonderful?

End of Book 06